THE INDEPENDENT

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THURSDAY 25 JANUARY 1996

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Deadlock on arms dashes peace hopes

Major accused of 'buying' votes

COLIN BROWN and DAVID MCKITTRICK

Hopes of breaking the deadlock in the Northern Ireland peace process ran into serious trouble last night after the nationalist parties accused John Major of trying to buy votes from the Ulster Unionists to prop up his Government in the Commons.

The Irish and British Governments were facing a crisis in the peace process after the report by US Senator George Mitchell had raised hopes of a breakthrough. The report warned it was a critical time in the history of Northern Ireland, which could "slip back to the horror of the past quarter-century" if progress was not made.

The report failed to provide any new solution to the deadlock over the IRA's refusal to begin decommissioning weapons.

The Government proposed an alternative way out by holding elections to a new Ulster body to appoint negotiating teams. But that plan looked doomed after John Hume, the leader of the SDLP, accused Mr Major of trying to buy the support of the Ulster Unionist MPs to safeguard his Commons majority.

Mr Hume was booed by Tory MPs who accused him of making a "cheap" allegation. Tory MPs shouted: "Disgrace".

Mr Major warned him that after working for years to bring people together for peace, it would be "a tragedy of enormous proportions" if he became the barrier to a settlement.

The Irish Government was also sceptical and was privately concerned about the election strategy, which Dublin sources said had been inadequately discussed. "There's nothing in it for the nationalists," said one Dublin source. Dick Spring, the Irish Foreign Minister, said it would mean those who supported the idea would have to persuade those who did not.

The Sinn Fein president, Gerry Adams, accused Mr Major of acting in bad faith and of erecting new preconditions to keep his party out of all-party talks. Republican sources said the election announcement had effectively killed off the Mitchell report and showed Mr Major was following a Unionist agenda to win Unionist backing for the Government.

The election move overshadowed the report of the internal body and introduced a stark fault line, with the Government and Unionists on one side and Nationalists on the other. Dublin sources accused Mr Major of ditching the report and of going on a "solo run", which had raised suspicions across the range of nationalism.

Mr Major last night sought to ease nationalist fears by insisting the body would be restricted to appointing negotiating teams and would not have legislative or administrative powers, such as a power-sharing Stormont Government.

Six commitments all parties should make

- Democratic and exclusively peaceful means of resolving political issues.
- The total disarmament of all paramilitary organisations.
- Agree that disarmament must be verifiable.
- Renounce the use or threat of force to influence the course or the outcome of all-party negotiations.
- Agree to abide by the terms of any agreement reached in all-party negotiations, and to use exclusively peaceful methods to try to alter any part of it with which they disagree.
- Urge that 'punishment' killings and beatings stop, and to take effective steps to prevent these.

The Mitchell commission concluded the paramilitaries would not meet the British demand to begin decommissioning arms before Sinn Fein was admitted to all-party talks.

Ministers fear the rejection of both routes to all-party talks – prior decommissioning and the elections – could leave the peace process in a cul-de-sac. The Government may seek to move on with the elections, challenging the parties to show their commitment to democracy by taking part.

Mr Hume stopped short of a threat to boycott elections, but his rejection of the plan, which was proposed first by the Ulster Unionists, could cause a fresh crisis in the peace process.

Mr Major, who urged the parties to "take a risk for peace", had been pinning his hopes on breaking the deadlock on the plan to use the elections to bring Sinn Fein to the negotiating table. The talks could take place at the same time as the IRA began disposing of its weapons before independent observers. It won the support of the Ulster Unionists and the hard-line Democratic Unionist MPs, led by Ian Paisley.

The Prime Minister told the Commons the Government would discuss the concerns with all the parties about the plan. "But in a democratic system like ours, I cannot see how elections could be regarded by any of the parties as a side issue or as a block to progress."

Tony Blair, the Labour leader, offered bipartisan support to enable an emergency bill to be passed to call the elections by April or May. But some of his own MPs, led by former Northern Ireland spokesman Kevin McNamara, rejected the election plan and accused Mr Major of seeking to keep power with Unionist support.

New focus same crisis, page15
Andrew Marr, page 2
Mitchell details, page 2

Harman apologises for political damage and distress

Troubles behind her: Harriet Harman, accompanied by Clare Short, after the meeting of the Parliamentary Labour Party Photograph: Reuter

Blair's appeal defuses revolt

DONALD MACINTYRE and PATRICIA WYNN-DAVIES

Tony Blair, the Labour leader, yesterday stifled a destablising campaign to unseat his shadow Secretary of State for Health, Harriet Harman, with a passionate call on his party to recover the unity needed to defeat the Tories.

Mr Blair, faced with a potentially catastrophic revolt over Ms Harman's controversial decision to send her 11-year-old son to a grammar school, reimposed his will on the party with a warning that he would not hand the Conservatives "the scalp" they were seeking.

Mr Blair's decisive victory at a highly-charged 70-minute meeting of MPs which exposed deep divisions in the party came after Ms Harman apologised for the political damage and "distress" inflicted by the row but stood firm on her right to have made the choice. But Ms Harman's supporters were astounded when Bernie Grant, the left-wing MP for Tottenham, made a powerful speech backing Ms Harman during which he excoriated the "appalling" standard of comprehensive schooling in inner-city London.

Mr Blair at one point described the Tories as "bastards" and declared: "I'm not going to allow the Tories the pleasure of crucifying any member of my Shadow Cabinet ... you must stand firm".

Ms Harman went on to tough out Tory attempts to derail her with a sure-footed performance, leading a Commons health debate flanked by Mr Blair and leading members of the Shadow Cabinet – including John Prescott, the party's deputy leader, who, like several other of his colleagues, is known to have been privately angered by Ms Harman's decision.

Mr Prescott, who throughout the episode has conspicuously failed to back Ms Harman personally, nevertheless sought yesterday to draw a line under the episode in his speech to the PLP meeting. He urged the party to unite behind Mr Blair's leadership and focus their energy on two forthcoming by-elections, in Hemsworth and Staffordshire South East.

But while Mr Blair unequivocally reasserted his party's commitment to non-selective comprehensive education, Cabinet ministers emerged from a meeting on political strategy determined to capitalise, between now and the general election, on the charges of "hypocrisy" provoked by Ms Harman's choice of a selective school.

Brian Mawhinney, the Tory party's chairman, said Mr Blair could not sack Ms Harman because he was using her as a "human shield" as he himself had sent his older son to a comprehensive which selected by interview.

But despite the widespread anger within Labour ranks over Ms Harman's decision, correspondence flowing into the party suggested that while there was deep unrest among activists, there was much more support for Ms Harman among the electorate at large.

Mr Blair told the meeting: "These decisions are bound to cause anguish. Many parents in this room have been faced with similar decisions and taken them differently, but we should respect the decisions that any individual takes. The issue, however, is no longer about Harriet and her child, but how we handle ourselves in this difficult period. Let me make it clear what

Continued on page 2

IN BRIEF

New man is old hat
The new man of the 1980s has failed to make it into the 1990s – eight out of 10 women still always or usually do the washing or ironing. **Page 5**

High price of the Euro
Too tough conditions for the creation of a European single currency – the Euro – could damage European economies and the stability of the EU itself, Valery Giscard d'Estaing warned. **Page 11**

Today's weather
Bitterly cold and windy with snow. **Section Two, page 33**

Child bride ordered back to Britain

STEVE BOGGAN and HUGH POPE

A High Court judge yesterday ordered the return to Britain of 13-year-old bride Sarah Cook as the girl's Turkish husband was remanded in custody on a charge of statutory rape.

Sarah's mother, Jackie, 37, flew to southern Turkey last night, admitting that she may have been wrong to consent to the illegal marriage and adding: "All I want to do now is get my daughter home."

Sir Stephen Brown, President of the Family Division of the High Court, made Sarah a ward of court at the request of Essex County Council's social services department. After a 30-minute hearing, he ordered her to be returned to the court's jurisdiction "forthwith" and demanded that any passport on which she travels home should be surrendered.

Sir Stephen's wide-ranging order also forbade Mrs Cook and her husband, Adrian, 42, from taking Sarah out of the country again and from talking about her case to the press. They are already understood to have earned more than £20,000 from selling her story to the *Sun*.

The schoolgirl from Braintree, Essex, was besieged by journalists yesterday in the cramped apartment she shares with her 18-year-old husband, Musa Komeagae – who she married in an unofficial ceremony two weeks ago – and his parents in Kahramanmaras, south eastern Turkey.

Meanwhile, her husband was brought before a Turkish court on charges of repeated statutory rape and suspected abduction of a minor and was remanded in custody for 30 days. His lawyers argued that the marriage took place with the consent of both sets of parents, although the minimum age for any marriage in Turkey – and then only with the special dispensation of a judge – is 14.

Musa's father said: "The two of them love each other madly. Because they insisted, the two families agreed. We love Sarah as our daughter. The English should not be worried. Love knows no law or boundary."

The English ruling is not binding in Turkey but there were indications last night that the authorities would recognise it. Before leaving for the airport, Mrs Cook said: "Looking back, perhaps letting Sarah get married was the wrong thing to do, but everyone makes mistakes. All I want to do now is get my daughter home."

Earlier in the day, however, Sarah had told the *Sun*: "If they keep Musa in jail, I will kill myself because I can't live without him." Musa's lawyer, Selim Sumen, also has an interest in her staying. He said: "Musa's only hope of getting out of prison is if they can apply to a court for special permission to marry when she is 14."

A Turkish foreign ministry spokesman said Sarah's visa was valid for a further three months. "At this stage, we could only forcibly remove her from Turkey at the request of her parents."

Leading article, page 14

Forte plan to buy back top hotels for £2.5bn

MATHEW HORSMAN

The Forte family last night unveiled a radical proposal to buy back the upmarket hotels it lost to Granada, in a deal that could be worth £2.5bn.

The dramatic announcement, which came after the market closed, would see Sir Rocco Forte and the Forte dynasty reclaim some of the world's best-known hotel properties, including the Grosvenor House in London and the George V in Paris.

Sir Rocco raised the plan at a meeting yesterday with Gerry Robinson, the chief executive of Granada, convened to discuss the handover of Forte, following its defeat in a two-month hostile £3.8bn battle.

Granada has promised to sell Forte's Meridien, Exclusive and trophy hotels, to pay off the £2.5bn in debt it took on to finance the hostile takeover. It intends to keep the budget Travelodge chain and the mid-market Posthouse properties.

In a statement issued last night, Sir Rocco said: "I am leading a team working on a plan to purchase from Granada the hotel business of Forte other than Posthouses and Travelodge. My objective is to make a detailed proposal to Granada in coming weeks."

A spokesman for Forte said Sir Rocco and his family would use the £300m proceeds from the sale of their own stake in Forte to Granada as equity in the new venture. The rest would come from debt. One analyst said the offer would be a highly leveraged buyout, reminiscent of the takeovers of the 1980s. "There will be a lot of debt to pay down if they pull this off."

No financing is yet in place, Forte conceded last night. But a spokesman said that "discussions about financing were encouraging". He added that the Forte family would seek a stock market listing in future if their audacious offer is accepted.

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news

Feast for N Ireland as Major eats his words

ANDREW MARR

It has been rare to see John Major retreat on an issue of substance and look a bigger man as a result. Yesterday in the Commons he walked backwards and grew in stature at the same time – an impressive manoeuvre. His acceptance that decommissioning of Irish terrorist weaponry might be carried out while political talks were continuing, is a clear retreat. But it was a virtuous one and a necessary one.

The old position that arms had to be surrendered before the political talks started was considered essential by London from the very first private conversations that led to the peace process. But the IRA didn't budge an inch.

It has been clear for months that Mr Major and Sir Patrick Mayhew were prepared, however reluctantly, to think again. Now they have – just as they, rather than the IRA, eventually moved on the silly verbal argument about whether the ceasefire was permanent or total.

It is never easy for politicians to eat their words, but complicated negotiation between previously unreconcilable enemies requires a lot of it. And the Prime Minister eats his very nicely. He was generous, smooth and sensible as he consumed the old precondition. He zig-zagged and moralised as he approached the only word of his statement that really mattered: "However." But he got there.

He cannot have liked some things he read in the Mitchell Report, with its unequivocal statement that the surrender of arms before talks "will not happen". But he swallowed all that too. As he told a questioner in the Commons: "There is something in this report which is uncomfortable for every party in these negotiations."

Whatever the discomfort, there is no escaping the logic underlying the idea of elections followed by talks-with-decommissioning: "If there can be no talks before arms decommissioning has started, and if arms decommissioning cannot start, why then – both must happen at the same time."

The question now is over the form of the body which David Trimble, the Ulster Unionist leader, wants to see elected by May. He already seems a new kind of Unionist leader – fast-moving, assertive, and self-certain. But he and Mr Major have to produce some kind of constitutional assembly which will reassure the nationalists that it exists not to administer the status quo, but to move the politics of the Province on.

Oddly, it may seem, the moderate nationalists in Dublin and in the SDLP were more worried about the elected assembly than Gerry Adams of Sinn Fein. John Hume, who has been a pillar of the peace process, was in uncharacteristically belligerent and ungracious mood, suggesting in the Commons that Mr Major was now in the pocket of the Unionists. He may suspect it. He has no evidence for it.

There are, of course, good reasons for moderate nationalists to flinch. Mr Hume has serious political problems if elections go ahead, including the prospect of his SDLP being out-played and out-spent in an electoral battle with Sinn Fein for the nationalist vote. That would be a sorry reward for his courage 18 months ago.

The SDLP is also worried about the smaller Unionist parties with paramilitary links being excluded from any new elected body; however unpleasant their pasts, these are essential to any final deal. So there has been a stand-off between the Unionists, who won't attend immediate talks without decommissioning; and the SDLP, who don't want elections before talks.

What the three eminent outsiders of the Mitchell Commission have done is to reassert the urgency and primacy of political movement and therefore tilt the argument towards the creation of an elected body "with an appropriate mandate".

Their short report makes the handing-over of at least some terrorist weapons seem suddenly more plausible.

For the British jurisdiction in modern times, its proposals are genuinely radical; for instance, arms handed over should be exempt under law from forensic examination, so that the police learn nothing about who had handled them. Handguns should be destroyed; amnesties on possession of illegal weapons should be established in both parts of Ireland. Yes, one thinks, this might actually happen.

Whether it does, and how soon, now rests with two parties above all. The Ulster Unionists have a duty to ensure that their proposed elected body is sufficiently focused and limited to be acceptable to the nationalists; and then the SDLP, however suspicious, have a duty to agree and to participate.

This will cause discomfort for both David Trimble and John Hume. They too will have to eat past words. But both are big figures; and the faster old words are chewed and swallowed, the better for Northern Ireland.

Mitchell report: Call for differences on de-commissioning not to obscure widespread support for disarmament

'Ceasefire must not be undervalued'

DAVID McKITTRICK
Ireland correspondent

The Mitchell report made the opening point that the republican and loyalist ceasefires had lasted almost a year and a half – saying that despite "punishment" killings and beatings, the sustained observance of the ceasefires should not be undervalued.

It said that differences on the timing and context of decommissioning should not obscure the near-universal support that existed for the total and verifiable disarmament of all paramilitary organisations.

The report said that to reach an agreed political settlement there had to be commitment to fundamental principles of democracy and non-violence. It set out six such principles, including a commitment to exclusively peaceful means, the total and verifiable disarmament of all paramilitary groups and the urging of an end to all "punishment" killings and beatings. It said parties should commit themselves that opposition to any new agreement should be confined to peaceful methods.

The report concluded there was a clear commitment on the part of those who held arms to work constructively towards decommissioning, but added that they would not do so prior to all-party negotiations.

It said the latter point was the view of the vast majority of the organisations and individuals which had made submissions to it, adding: "Many favour (prior decommissioning) but they are convinced that it will not happen. That is the reality with which all concerned must deal."

The report declared: "As progress is made on political issue, even modest mutual steps on decommissioning could help create the atmosphere needed for further steps in a progressive pattern of mounting trust and confidence."

Dealing with decommissioning itself, the report said the process should suggest neither victory nor defeat. "Amnesties should be established in law in both jurisdictions. Armaments made available for decommissioning, whether directly or indirectly, should be exempt in law from forensic examination. Information obtained as a result of the decommissioning process should be inadmissible as evidence in courts of law."

In addition to its recommendations, the report listed a number of ideas that could build confidence: paramilitary groups could end surveillance of possible targets, provide information about those missing and believed dead, and lift threats against people. Measures for the authorities to consider included action on prisoners, a review of emergency legislation, the use of plastic bullets and the religious make-up of the Royal Ulster Constabulary.

The report added that several submissions had raised the idea of an elected body. It noted: "If it were broadly acceptable, with an appropriate mandate, and within the three-strand (ie Belfast-London-Dublin) structure, an elective process could contribute to the building of confidence."

Wise men: George Mitchell (centre) with General John de Chastelain (left) and Harri Holkeri delivering their report yesterday Photograph: Crispin Rodwell

George Mitchell, 61

A former Senator who serves on a number of corporate boards and lectures at colleges and universities throughout US. Appointed to the Senate in 1980 to fill the unexpired term of Senator Edmund Muskie, resigning as a federal judge to take up the post before being re-elected in 1982 and 1988. As senator, elected as Senate majority leader in three consecutive Congresses. Leading light on environmental issues, he led effort for 1990 Clean Air Act. US District Court Judge from 1979 to 1980 and US Attorney for Maine in 1977 to 1979. Born in Waterville, Maine, served in Berlin as US Army counter-intelligence officer. Married to a businesswoman, Heather MacLachlen, and has one daughter, Arthea, by a previous marriage.

General John de Chastelain, 58

Was first appointed Chief of the Canadian Defence Staff in 1989, a post he held until 1993, when he transferred to the reserves and was appointed ambassador to the US. The following year, he was recalled to active duty and reappointed to defence staff. It was the crowning moment of military career which began in 1955 as a private in the Canadian Army Militia. In 1965 he served as a company commander in the United Nations Force in Cyprus, rising to command a battalion of the Princess Patricia's Canadian Light Infantry from 1970 to 1972. He is a past president of the Dominion of Canada Rifle Association and a former vice president of the Scouts of Canada. With wife Mary, he has a son, a daughter and two grand-daughters.

Harri Holkeri, 58

To be prime minister of Finland from 1987 to 1991 was the culmination of a long political career for Harri Holkeri. He rose to prominence in politics as secretary general of the National Coalition Party in 1965, becoming chairman in 1971 until 1979. He became an MP in 1970, serving as a member of the foreign affairs committee and chairing the parliamentary supervisors of the Bank of Finland. In the two years which preceded his move into politics in the mid-1960s he was a member of the Finnish delegation at the UN, a year after graduating from Helsinki University in 1962. He holds the rank of major in the Reserve Army and has a son, daughter and three grandchildren from his marriage to Marja-Liisa in 1960.

IN BRIEF

MPs rap 'Guardian' over Aitken fax

Peter Preston, former editor of *The Guardian*, escaped punishment yesterday for doctoring Commons notepaper to obtain a hotel bill incurred by the Tory MP Jonathan Aitken.

The Commons Privileges Committee said it accepted Mr Preston's apology that sending the "cod fax" was "a stupid and discourteous thing to have done" and his assurance he would not do it again.

Mr Preston sent the fax as part of his newspaper's efforts to establish who paid for Mr Aitken's stay at the Ritz Hotel in Paris owned by Mohammed Al Fayed. It purported to come from Mr Aitken and was a intended to protect Mr Fayed, who was co-operating with the paper, from accusations of breaking a client's confidence.

The committee concluded that Mr Preston and *The Guardian* were "guilty of unwise and improper conduct".

Conveyancing move

The Law Society's ruling council will today decide their next move over a scheme to ban cut-price conveyancing after leading counsel advised the plan is within the law. The scheme, devised by the president Martin Mears and his deputy Robert Sayer – and questioned by the the Master of the Rolls, Sir Thomas Bingham – will take away insurance from any firm which undercuts recommended fee levels for house deals.

£2m 'skunk' haul

Police seized more than 2,000 powerful cannabis plants known as "skunk weed" valued at more than £2m in a raid on a drugs farm on an industrial estate in Widnes, Cheshire. Three men were arrested.

Polar melt alert

An area of Antarctic ice the size of Norfolk has melted into the sea since 1945 due to rising temperatures, according to research by the British Antarctic Survey which suggests the trend will continue. In the past 50 years the local temperature at the South Pole has risen by 2.5C causing 8,000 sq km of the ice shelf to break off.

Baby breakthrough

Scientists from the National Institute for Medical Research at University College, in London, have made a "milestone" discovery which may lead to more test-tube baby conceptions by finding a protein in sperm which triggers a fertilised egg turning into an embryo, the Medical Research Council said.

Power record

Demand for electricity met a new record in England and Wales on Tuesday as temperatures plunged and high winds sent an icy blast over much of the country. The National Grid said demand soared to 48,029 megawatts – equivalent to 48 million one-bar electric fires – beating the previous record of 47,929 set in January, 1987.

Shop raids alert

The number of shop robberies and till snatches rose dramatically last year with the total cost of all crimes against retailers reaching £2bn, says a survey by the British Retail Consortium.

Sinclair fights ban

Football star Trevor Sinclair was fined £480 and banned for 12 months after admitting drink-driving. The QPR striker was caught over the limit when driving a friend's car 30 yards, Preston magistrates were told. The England Under-21 international had the ban suspended pending an appeal.

Water safety first

Scottish Office environment minister, Lord Lindsay, announced that a borehole in Fife is to be designated a nitrate vulnerable zone in the British Government's first scheme to safeguard water from nitrate pollution in response to a European directive aimed at protecting drinking water supplies.

'Poverty' wage row

Labour hit out at the "scandal" of low pay after a vacancy for a trainee landscape gardener was advertised in a JobCentre in Chorley, Lancashire, offering a wage of £1 an hour. The advert attracted one applicant.

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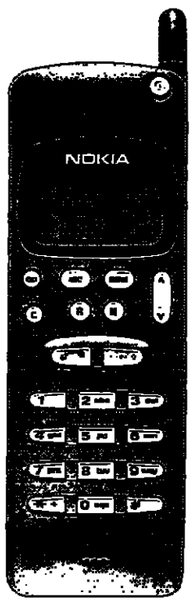

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Left-wing MP regrets rejecting private education for his children

PATRICIA WYNN DAVIES
Political Correspondent

Bernie Grant accuses inner-city schools of failing to encourage their pupils

"The comprehensive schools in inner-city areas of London are very bad indeed, and are failing our children." Thus Bernie Grant, the left-wing Labour MP for Tottenham, north London, speaking from his own bitter experience.

It must have been beyond Tony Blair's wildest expectations that the one-time black radical would give such overwhelming backing to the choice made by Harriet Harman.

The 51-year-old MP could not have been more uncompromising. He was appalled at the standard of comprehensive education in his area, he told MPs at yesterday's Parliamentary Labour Party meeting.

In an interview with the *Independent* afterwards, he frankly admitted that with hindsight he regretted not considering the private sector for his children, but his former position as leader of Haringey council in north London had made that unthinkable.

The father of three sons, one now 20 and twins of 18, the sense of disappointment is palpable from a man once regarded as a high priest of political correctness.

He declined to name the Haringey school that is still attended by one of the twins, who is studying for A-levels with the help of £20 an hour private tuition to "get him up to scratch".

The other twin is training as a chef. The 20-year-old was on a design course but is currently unemployed.

He said his sons were "very very seriously hampered" by the quality of their schooling, and blamed not only a question of resources through cuts in Haringey's standard spending assessment, but also attitudes and standards.

Bernie Grant: Sons were 'seriously hampered'

"The staff believe the kids won't make it. They don't encourage the kids to fix their aspirations very high."

He said of a young constituent at a Haringey comprehensive who secured a place at Oxford: "She was absolutely castigated by her teachers. She was told it was an élitist place for public school kids. At Oxford she had a complex and didn't perform as well as she should have done."

He had concerns about his sons throughout their early schooling but as council leader felt he could do little about it.

Now black constituents were moving out of Tottenham or sending their children to the Caribbean to be educated: "When they get to the Caribbean they are put in classes two years younger than them."

With hindsight, would he have opted for private education, politics and money permitting? "Absolutely". He adds: "I hope some good comes out of all of this."

Blair plea defuses Labour revolt

From page 1

this is now about. The Tories are trying to turn the education of an 11-year-old boy into a party political football. They want a scalp as their prize."

Before he spoke Ms Harman had declared in an emotional speech: "I know how difficult it has been for David Blunkett [the shadow Secretary of State for Education].

"I deeply regret that any decision I have taken has given any succour to the Tories and any opportunity for them to attack the Labour Party. I apologise to colleagues for the diversion.

Ms Harman went on: "I understand the strength of feeling and deeply regret the distress that has been caused."

She insisted she was "opposed" to selection, but said: "I was faced with a difficult choice and each of us has to solve the problems faced by providing good schooling for our children in our own way. I would prefer the school that I had sent my child to not to be selective."

Mr Grant began a powerful and totally unexpected speech with the words: "I support Harriet Harman 100 per cent." His three children had gone to a comprehensive in the Tottenham area and he now regretted it. This was a "personal decision by Harriet and Jack and as such none of our business." He had remained silent about many things in the Labour Party over the last eight years but he now had to speak out.

Alice Mahon, in a speech judged by some to be the most effective of the anti-Harman contributions, said the party had been deeply damaged and there were now deep divisions in Parliament and among Labour supporters in the country. If she was determined to send her child to St. Olave's school she should resign.

Roy Hattersley said "We must solidify our commitment to comprehensive education. If at the end of this the vast majority of people know we are on their side then we can turn this issue to our advantage."

Glenda Jackson said the greatest damage that could come from the episode was if Labour failed to be elected because in the face of difficulty "we had lost our nerve." She did not "agree with Harriet's decision" but she had every right to make it.

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Prince wants lottery cash to build mosques

REBECCA FOWLER

The Prince of Wales has suggested lottery money should be spent on new mosques and Hindu temples in Britain. He also accused lottery chiefs in charge of the £1.6bn fund to celebrate the millennium of ignoring its spiritual importance.

The Prince, who will inherit the role of defender of the Church of England, said Britain should use the millennium fund for buildings for all faiths, and not allow celebrations to collapse into "a giant, but essentially meaningless party".

He made the comments in *Perspectives*, the architecture magazine he helped to found. "We need to think more deeply about what the millennium means ... Everyone, whatever culture or beliefs, can have a stake in the process which the millennium represents.

"I would hope that a start might be made to help those faiths growing in Britain but struggling to create places of worship to erect buildings of real quality. This is one of those instances where millennium money may be able to build bridges across some of those divisions in Britain's society."

But his attempts to champion faiths other than Christianity have already divided religious leaders. Muslims are forbidden to gamble and many would be reluctant to accept lottery grants from the Millennium Commission, which would offend Islamic law.

Liaqat Hussain, a spokesman for the Bradford Council of Mosques, said the Prince had been ill-advised. "Gambling is *haram*, or forbidden, and it is prohibited to benefit from anything that proceeds from it, so lottery funds could not be used for mosques." But Zaki Badawi, chairman of the Imams and Mosques Council of Great Britain, commended the Prince's support, and said he believed religious leaders could make an exception to accept funds. "The Prince is striking a very important chord in the heart of all minorities who would like to be recognised as mainstream," Dr Badawi said. "Although we have discouraged mosques applying for lottery money, we would see this as money coming from the state and would advise communities to accept it."

The Prince's comments are also expected to spark a debate on the prominence of Christianity over other faiths in Britain. In recent years he has promoted the idea that other faiths are of equal importance, and described himself as a future "defender of the faiths".

The Church of England, one of the most outspoken critics of the lottery, has accepted grants for Church buildings. But it refused to comment on the Prince's remarks, and said it was a matter for the imams of the mosques as to whether they would accept financial support.

So far the Millennium Commission has allocated £336.5m for 306 projects. Yesterday it said it welcomed a debate on the best way to celebrate 2000 and denied it was oblivious to the spiritual aspect. A spokesman said: "We obviously welcome the Prince of Wales's contribution to this debate; we've had public consultations at every stage. We're already having informal discussions with many faiths on their feelings about the millennium."

The Prince has also called for lottery money to be spent improving inner cities and encouraging city dwellers to find new uses for redundant buildings that might help the poor.

Two face jail over 'simple' £13m fraud

A solicitor and a former nuts and bolts salesman were found guilty yesterday of defrauding the cooker company Belling and some of Europe's largest companies in a £13m fraud.

Charles Deacon, a former under-sheriff for Stafford, and his partner in crime James Fuller spent years fooling money-hungry people and businesses with amazing tales of international intrigue, the CIA and massive secret funds.

To back up their tales, letters were forged from the then American President George Bush, the American Secret Service and top banks. Helped by John Savage, an American who has since died and who claimed to be a senior CIA agent, their victims fell for the stories.

Apart from Belling, which was fooled into raiding its pension fund, victims also included Russia's largest co-operative and Finland's biggest food processing company.

Deacon, 52, who practised in Newcastle under Lyme in Staffordshire, and Fuller, 56, now face up to 14 years in jail. They will be sentenced at Middlesex Crown Court in central London today.

Deacon, a bankrupt, of Newcastle under Lyme, Staffordshire, was convicted of six charges of conspiracy to defraud and two of obtaining property by deception. Fuller, from Kidsgrove in Staffordshire, was found guilty on the six conspiracy charges and a deception charge. The jury took just four hours to consider three-and-a-half months of evidence and return its unanimous verdicts.

Opening the prosecution case last October John Goldring QC had told the court: "You may think it would be a difficult task to steal this amount. It is simpler than you think. All you need is a little nerve and a total disregard for the truth."

Deacon had put himself forward as the honest advocate. For added effect, he frequently flashed his practice certificate and indemnity insurance cover to possible victims. In his office he had an impressive photograph of President Bush – with whom he claimed to be on first name terms – framed with the White House incumbent's inauguration programme.

Police believe Deacon and Fuller, who claimed to one gullible victim that he was the inventor of the world's first heart-lung machine, were part of a 12-strong gang – four in the US and the rest in Britain.

The court heard that Belling was among Deacon's and Fuller's first victims. In 1991, the company, based in Enfield, north London, was struggling to survive. When the firm was offered a lifeline loan of £33.5m, its directors could not resist.

Shown a forged letter from Lord Tugendhat, deputy chairman of National Westminster Bank, about a £750m "facility", company officials agreed to the terms – one year's upfront interest to secure the much needed rescue package. They handed over more than £2m from their company pension fund. They never saw the money again. When they asked about the loan they were fobbed off with excuses.

The company folded in 1992, but according to some reports the swindle may have long-lasting effects on its 850 deferred pensioners – those who have not yet retired. According to one source, they could lose up to half their pension entitlement. The Law Society's solicitors' compensation scheme has already paid out £600,000 to victims, much of it in connection with Belling. Another £2m in claims is pending.

Mr Goldring told the judge that despite intensive inquiries it had been impossible to discover what had happened to £2.4m of the £9m that had not yet been recovered. However, detectives had found that £2m of the as yet untraced money had been laundered through about 40 different companies.

Appliance of science: Teenager's research ranked alongside Nobel winners

Order from chaos: Justin Marston at BNFL in Springfield, where he is working for a year before starting university Photograph: Craig Easton

The tap that dripped for 200 hours

TOM WILKIE
Science Editor

An 18-year old Lancashire schoolboy today joins the ranks of the world's top scientists, as his research is published in the world's premier scientific journal, *Nature*.

Nobel prizewinners queue up to have their research published in *Nature*, but the journal today publishes the results of experiments Justin Marston did during his sixth-form A-level project.

Mr Marston spent more than 200 hours on his project – watching a dripping tap. It may sound downbeat, but his work actually deals with two of the hottest topics in science today – chaos and complexity theory.

Some of the best brains in the world ponder these topics at the high-powered Santa Fe Institute in New Mexico, USA. Mr Marston investigated them at Runshaw Tertiary College in Leyland near Preston, using "central heating header tanks bought from plumbers' merchants and a pump from the local garden centre".

Mr Marston was quick to deny that his work was of Nobel calibre. He said "I was shocked when I found out they [*Nature*] were going to publish it."

In science, chaos is a tightly defined term, used to describe behaviour of physical or biological systems that appears completely random but actually has an underlying pattern or series of patterns. The term has stuck, despite being misleading in the way that its scientific use is almost the opposite of the everyday use.

"I always thought chaotic physics was small atoms moving around. But the dripping tap is a classic chaotic system. It's very close to my own experience. I think that brought it to life," said the young scientist.

He got interested in the phenomenon and recorded half a million observations. "Some of my friends said 'send it to a journal for publication' so I thought I might as well start at the top – *Nature*," he said.

Mr Marston studied how fast his "tap" (actually a capillary tube) dripped and how the rate was influenced by pressure in the header tank. He found that "as would be expected, with increasing water pressure, the average time between drips decreases, but not in a linear manner".

Despite having his experiment published, Mr Marston intends to study biochemistry at Durham University in October. He could have chosen almost any scientific discipline, since he obtained six straight A grades in his A-levels: mathematics, biology, chemistry, physics, music and general studies.

He hopes to pursue a career in science, but hasn't yet decided between academia and industrial research.

Cancer victim 'killed wealthy lover'

JONATHAN FOSTER

Lethal doses of painkiller were added to a millionaire's supper by the terminally ill woman he thought was his wife, a court heard yesterday.

Lynn Lowey, 39, wanted Ian Whalley's money and his life. She knew she had only nine months to live when she spiked his chicken stew and jacket potatoes with drugs prescribed to ease the pain of her cancer, magistrates in Huyton, Merseyside, were told.

Mrs Lowey denies murdering Mr Whalley, 56, between 7-8 January. She faces further charges of poisoning, bigamy and fraudulent benefit claims.

Reporting restrictions were lifted during the hearing as Paul Becker, for the prosecution, said Mrs Lowey met Mr Whalley five years ago. The relationship was "stormy" and punctuated by several separations. But in April 1994 Mrs Lowey went through a marriage ceremony to the "prosperous but frugal" Mr Whalley in Gibraltar.

Her first marriage had been dissolved in 1985. Her second, to John Lowey, bore two children. The couple separated in 1989, with custody of their children awarded to their father.

The Lowey marriage was never ended, so the Gibraltar ceremony was bigamous, Mr Becker said. But Mrs Lowey lived as man and wife with Mr Whalley at Bold, near St Helens.

On 8 January, his body was found by his son by his late wife in the caravan he shared with Mrs Lowey during construction of a new home. A post-mortem examination of the body revealed fatal quantities of morphine and Temazepam. Two of Mrs Lowey's cousins had told police that she was "obsessed with money", wanted Mr Whalley dead, but also wanted a share of his wealth. The cousins would give evidence that she told them: "No more Ian. Now I'm free."

Mrs Lowey was charged last week and remanded to Risley prison, Cheshire.

Graham Simpson, for Mrs Lowey, said the cousins' evidence would be challenged. Mr Whalley could not face the fact that the woman he thought his wife had terminal cancer; his wife of 28 years had also died of cancer.

Opposing a further remand in custody, Mr Simpson denied prosecution claims that Mrs Lowey would, if bailed, pose "tremendous danger" to witnesses, abscond, or commit suicide. "She wants to establish her innocence, then die," he said.

Magistrates refused bail; she was remanded in custody for seven days.

Highly rated: Staff eating at the River Café in west London

Cafés less than starry-eyed over award

CLARE GARNER

The *Michelin Guide*'s attempt to embrace a wider, more eclectic range of restaurants within its culinary bible has backfired with the revelation that the less traditional eateries have only been awarded low ratings.

The crowning glory of three stars remains strictly reserved for an élite band of four, while two- and one- star ratings are still out of reach for many top-class restaurants. However, the *Michelin Guide* bestowed an unusually large number of lower ratings, including 17 new one-stars and 25 new Red Meals, this year.

Highly lauded restaurants such as London's River Café and Alastair Little were unimpressed with their Red Meal ratings. They criticised inspectors for being out of touch and burdened by French bias.

For the first time in its nine-year history, the River Café made its way into the gastronomic index – albeit unwittingly. The popular Italian restaurant was not exactly bowled over.

Rose Gray, the co-owner, was taken aback by the entry. Once reassured the restaurant had achieved red "M" status, code for "less elaborate but carefully prepared meals", she replied: "We are really low down, is that what you are saying? ... Hooray, good, fabulous." It didn't matter, she insisted. "For me the *Michelin Guide* means very little. After all, we haven't been in the *Michelin Guide* since day one and lots of people like us. We get awards from other guides that give us top ratings."

A Michelin spokesman denied there was a deliberate attempt to broaden the criteria this year. "Anyway there are any number of ethnic restaurants included in our guide," he said.

"The restaurants we have chosen reached a standard that is satisfactory to our board. We are looking at the quality of the food, the care with which it is prepared, and the execution of the dishes."

The pioneering British chef Alastair Little, whose "Red Meal" restaurant in Soho is a non-mover in Michelin's culinary charts, was similarly unimpressed. He dismissed the guide as "totally pointless".

"It's all a bit of a nonsense. They are completely and totally out of touch with what represents decent food in England. They basically seem to like posh French cooking with extreme consistency – which is important – and can't come to terms with popular or populist places at all."

☐ The 23rd edition of the *Michelin Guide to Hotels & Restaurants in Great Britain and Ireland*; £12.99.

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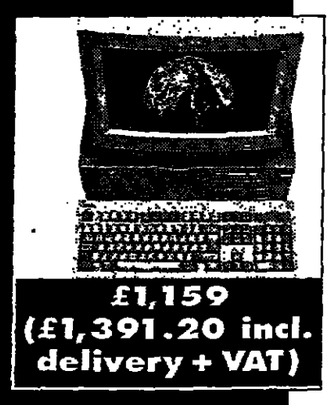

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news

School tests show decline in standard of English

JUDITH JUDD
Education Editor

Results of last year's national tests at 14 in English, to be published today, are worse than the previous year's with only about 50 per cent of the pupils reaching the standard expected by the Government.

The proportion of pupils getting the top grades has fallen sharply, lending support to English teachers' claims that marking this year was unfair to bright pupils.

Traditionalists said even the 1994 English results showed unacceptable standards of literacy and undermined teachers' claims that standards are rising.

English teachers, however, say the tests are too narrow and do not allow pupils to show what they can do. They want more coursework and fewer formal tests.

Full results of national curriculum tests for 7-, 11- and 14-year-olds taken last spring and summer by 2 million children will be released by Gillian Shephard, the Secretary of State for Education, today.

Delay in publishing the results has fuelled speculation that they are disappointing.

The tests are marked on a scale of one (bottom) to eight (top). Last year, for the first time, they were marked by external markers instead of class teachers.

The Government says that the average 14-year-old should reach between level five and six. But last year only 55 per cent reached level five or better in English compared with 58 per cent the year before.

Only 20 per cent reached level six or more, compared with 31 per cent last year, and just 4 per cent reached levels seven and eight, compared with more than 10 per cent in the previous year – a difference of nearly 40,000 pupils.

The results take into account the 20,000 pupils who had their marks changed after 900 schools complained about unfair marking.

An Exeter University report on the tests, to be published shortly, will say that questions in the compulsory Shakespeare paper were too narrow to allow bright pupils to show what they could do.

Bethan Marshall, an executive member of the National Association for the Teaching of English, which complained about inexperienced markers, said: "The markers were not all English specialists and the mark scheme was too rigid to take account of the bright child who comes up with unexpected answers. This has created some extremely erratic results."

The School Curriculum and Assessment Authority, which advises the Government on exams, has admitted there were difficulties over marking English tests and has promised to tighten up the supervision and training for markers.

It is also piloting new tests for 14-year-olds on Shakespeare which would include coursework and would allow teachers to set tests when they chose. It says English teachers have exaggerated the problems over marking.

Dr Nick Tate, the authority's chief executive, said before Christmas that the test results suggested that standards of reading and writing among seven-year-olds were rising while those in maths remained much the same.

Results for 14-year-olds in English, maths and science remained much the same.

Mrs Shephard will also announce that the Government is to consult on whether to go ahead with performance tables for primary schools based on national tests at 11. At present performance tables are confined to GCSE and A-level results.

Ministers have said they intend to wait until tests for 11-year-olds have "bedded down" before introducing tables. The first tests were set last year.

Missing link: Pot-holer Steve Thomas wading into the major cave system at Dan yr Ogof, in Powys, as part of a search for 10 miles of missing passageways brought to the attention of cavers by continuing heavy flows of water during last summer's drought Photograph: Rob Stratton

Income support fraud reaches £1.4bn a year

CHRIS BLACKHURST
Westminster Correspondent

Fraud by claimants of income support is running at £1.4bn a year, the National Audit Office confirms today. The public spending watchdog found that almost 1 in 10 of income support recipients are estimated to be fiddling their claims. In all, 561,000 people, or 9.7 per cent of claimants, are committing fraud, the NAO reckons.

False information definitely lay behind payments of £636m, said the NAO, and there is a "strong suspicion" of fraud in cases worth another £773m.

So great is the problem that Sir John Bourn, the head of the NAO and the Comptroller and Auditor-General, refused to give the Benefits Agency, which administers Income Support, a clean bill of health. The agency's accounts were qualified, said the NAO, "because of the high level of expenditure arising from fraudulent claims".

Around 10 per cent of total Income Support payments of £16.6bn is being claimed dishonestly – a proportion that will make grim reading for Peter Lilley, the Secretary of State for Spcial Security, and will fuel demands from Tory backbenchers for a renewed crackdown.

It comes after a recent study from his department found that fraud in housing benefit, which is dealt with by local councils, may be costing £1bn a year.

In July Mr Lilley announced a new approach for the Benefits Agency – developed after concerns in 1994 – to combat cheats. The strategy puts new emphasis on trying to stop fraud occurring in the first place, while boosting detection and investigation.

Costing £300m, Mr Lilley's onslaught is expected to yield savings of £2bn over the next three years. This year, said the NAO, as part of a further tightening up, the Agency has promised to: simplify the rules on housing costs; improve its computer system; make extra checks before payments; bolster training and send hit squads into agency branches where fraud is especially prevalent.

New divorce laws like 'a shotgun wedding'

The new Family Law Bill is the "legal equivalent of a shotgun wedding" with some aspects hasty and ill-thought-out, says the *Which? Guide to Divorce*, writes Glenda Cooper.

And the Child Support Agency has been a "lost opportunity" due to the complexity of its mechanisms, claims the guide's author, Helen Garlick.

Under the "12-month no-fault" divorce proposals before Parliament, the emphasis will be on mediation to resolve disputes, with restricted access to lawyers.

Of the plans for couples to discuss finance, property and children with trained mediators – viewed by many solicitors as likely to lever them out of the divorce business – Ms Garlick said: "Its success greatly depends on the skill of the mediators. Yet the assumption is a nationwide network of trained mediators will materialise quickly."

The book warns mediation is not always appropriate, particularly if there are heated and complex disputes. But it welcomes the domestic violence reforms as overdue and the "very sensible re-ordering of the current messy and confusing law".

Ms Garlick, a solicitor, says the Child Support Agency may need a "radical overhaul" if it is to survive.

■ Marriage is continuing to go out of fashion. Since 1992, when 426,000 couples were married, the number of weddings has fallen by a third. In 1993, there were 299,197 marriages and a record 165,000 divorces.

Mental health care 'in crisis'

GLENDA COOPER

An investment of £500m is needed to stop the crisis in care for schizophrenics and reduce their 1-in-10 suicide rate, the National Schizophrenia Fellowship said yesterday.

Gary Hogman, research officer with the NSF, told the Royal College of Psychiatrists winter meeting in Stratford-upon-Avon that a multi-million pound investment was needed urgently if proper care was to be delivered to the mentally ill. The £500m would be spent on staff and staff training.

The call comes a week after an inquiry set up by the Government into 39 homicides and 240 suicides involving the mentally ill produced fierce criticism of the National Health Service.

The report, by the Royal College of Psychiatrists, found many patients who killed or committed suicide had lost contact with the psychiatric services or were refusing to comply with treatment.

In a paper called *Carers, Crisis and Cash*, Mr Hogman said that unbearable strain was being put on informal carers who look after schizophrenics – 90 per cent of whom live in the community.

More than four in five carers were providing "crisis" care – caring for someone who has had a severe relapse in mental health and is a danger to themselves and others. And 70 per cent of carers had experienced physical or mental health problems themselves "as a result of the extra burden of caring".

"NSF members are frequently made aware that you have to have a crisis before you can access the mental health services," said Mr Hogman.

"Generally the situation has not improved over the last 10 or 20 years. Informal carers have been left out of the equation and not given the information or support they deserve."

Mr Hogman added: "If what we have now is 'community care' then it is working effectively for only a small minority with severe mental illness. More resources must be made available or the Government must admit the policy cannot been implemented."

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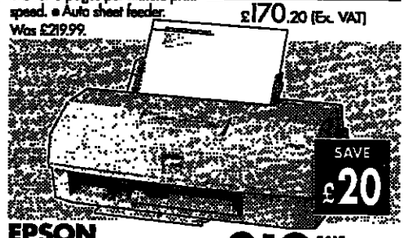

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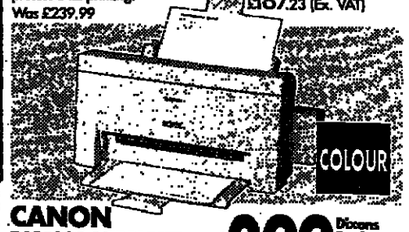

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Social Trends: Women still do most housework

New Man fails to survive into the Nineties

NICHOLAS TIMMINS
Public Policy Editor

The New Man of the 1980s has failed to make it into the 1990s. Among couples, eight out of ten women still always or usually do the washing or ironing. Only 35 per cent of men share the job of deciding what to have for dinner and while men and women share shopping more equally, it is still men who are overwhelmingly likely to do the repairs around the home.

More people are taking two holidays a year and more are going abroad. Spending on food and tobacco as a proportion of household expenditure is falling, but housing and transport is taking a larger slice of household budgets, the *Social Trends* analysis of lifestyle and expenditure reveals.

Women spend eight hours more per week on housework, cooking and shopping even when they are working full-time – and as a result men in full-time work tend to have two hours' more free time at weekends than their working partners. But some things change: the proportion of women doing home improvements in their free time rose to 30 per cent.

And while men remain more likely than women to take part in sport or other physical activity, the gap between the genders has narrowed. In 1993-94, 57 per cent of women took part in at least one activity in the four weeks preceding a survey, against 72 per cent of men.

Walking is the most popular activity for both sexes, but men were four times more likely to play golf, snooker, pool or billiards than women, while higher proportions of women than men went swimming or attended keep-fit classes.

At home, watching television remains overwhelmingly the favourite leisure time activity, with people spending an average 19 hours a week in front of the television or listening to the radio, compared with five hours visiting friends, three reading, and two playing games or hobbies or computing.

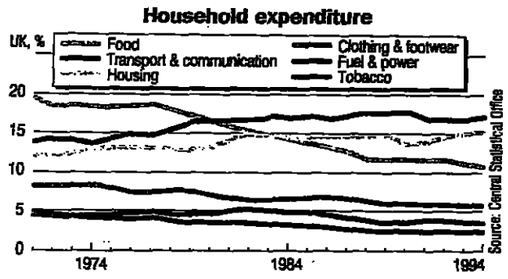
On average, three hours a week are spent eating or drinking out, two hours on walks or other recreation and just one on sport. Cycling, despite greater interest in bicycle lanes, has continued to decline, at least on public roads. In 1951, this activity accounted for a quarter of all road traffic, with 21 billion kilometres covered. By 1994, kilometres covered had fallen by one-fifth and cyclists made up just 1 per cent of traffic.

Outside the home, arts activities are increasing. Cinema attendances were up 10 per cent to 124 million admissions in 1994 and attendances at the ballet and opera, at plays, classical music and art galleries all rose over the past decade.

Rising wealth – household spending has risen by three-quarters since 1971 – has seen changing expenditure patterns. The proportion spent on food has nearly halved to 11 per cent since 1971, and the proportion spent on other essentials such as fuel, power, clothing and footwear also fell. Housing, however, accounts for a higher proportion – the result both of rising owner-occupation and higher rents. Expenditure on holidays abroad nearly quadrupled over the same period.

The proportion of adults taking one holiday a year has remained fairly constant at about 60 per cent, but the proportion taking two or more has risen fourfold to 26 per cent over the past 30 years. Changed expenditure on food has not prevented a healthier diet – though not among the young. The 16- to 24- year-olds were the least likely to eat vegetables, salad, fruit and high-fibre cereal regularly. In addition, higher proportions of 18- to 24-year-olds drank excessively.

Household expenditure



Division of household tasks, 1994
Great Britain, %

	Always the woman	Usually the woman	About equal or both together	Usually the man	Always the man	All couples
Washing and ironing	47	32	18	1	1	100
Deciding what to have for dinner	27	32	35	3	1	100
Looking after sick family members	22	26	45	-	-	100
Shopping for groceries	20	21	52	4	1	100
Small repairs around the house	2	3	18	49	25	100

Source: British Social Attitudes Survey, Social & Community Planning Research

Education takes more time as work shrinks

Britons are becoming better qualified, retiring or having to give up work earlier, and spending longer in education, according to the latest edition of *Social Trends*, **writes Nicholas Timmins.**

But despite an educational and work revolution which is tending to shorten working lives while the population ages, young people still quit formal education much more quickly than in many competitor countries. Education is starting earlier. More than half of three- and four-year-olds now attend school full- or part-time, compared with one-fifth 25 years ago.

The proportion staying on at school past 16 has almost doubled since 1980, and there has been a "spectacular" growth in the number of 18-year-olds entering further and higher education. In the three years to 1993-94 the number of full-time students increased more than 40 per cent in higher education and 50 per cent in further education – increases greater than over the whole of the previous decade.

But despite such dramatic growth, the UK still lags behind other countries. By 18, barely half are still in education against four-fifths in France and Germany. In addition, more than one-third of UK participants are part-time when in other countries education and training is almost all full-time.

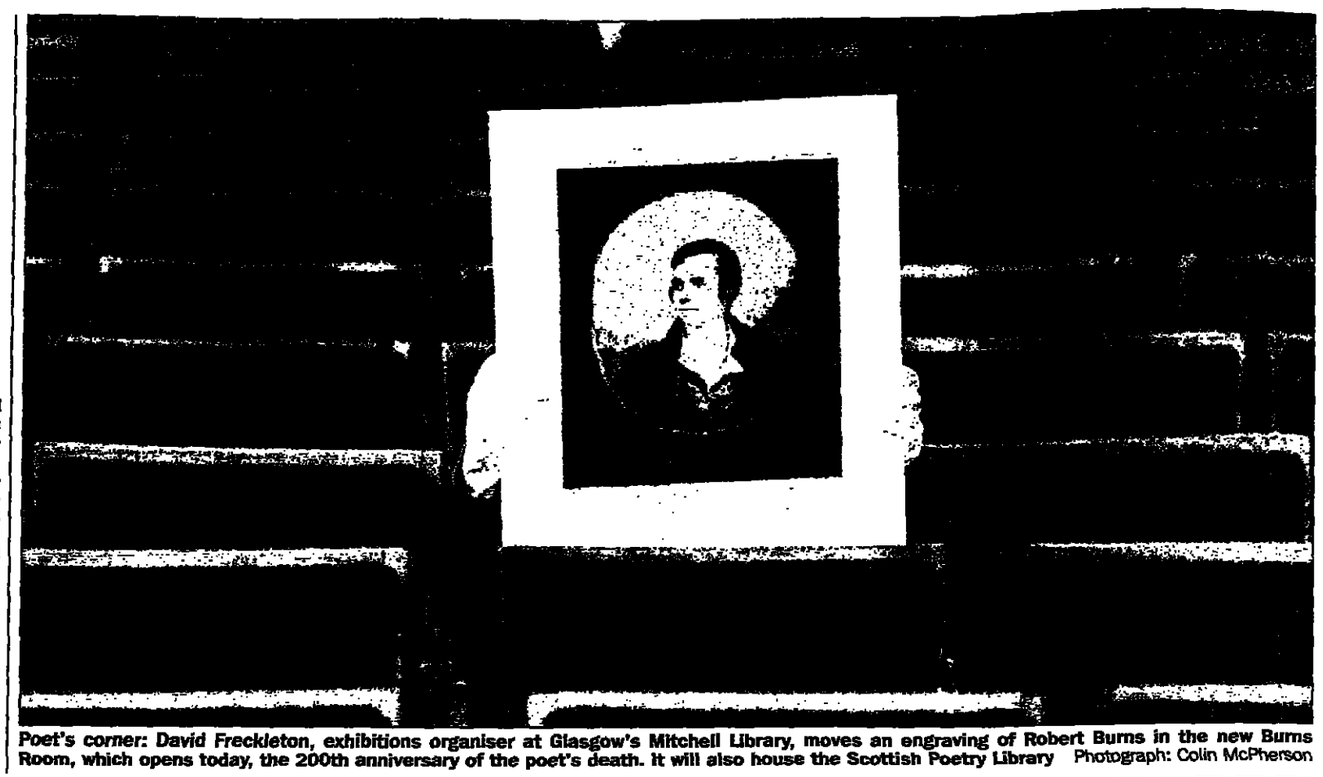
As education lengthens, however, working life, particularly for men, is being squeezed at the other end. Only a fraction more than half (51 per cent) of men aged 60 to 64 now work, against four out of five in 1971, and the proportion is expected to fall below a half by 2000.

Some of the dramatic decline reflects earlier retirement made possible by the growth of occupational pension schemes. But some is forced retirement. Older workers – along with the young – are the most likely to be made redundant. And once out of a job, older workers are the least likely to get back into one. Of men unemployed for a year, about 60 per cent of those aged 50 to 64 had been out of work for a year or more compared with 45 per cent of those aged 20 to 29. "Redundancy is a real fear among people," *Social Trends* records, even though redundancy rates have fallen in recent years.

The changed work patterns have also brought a marked shift in people's attitudes over the role of trade unions. Seven years ago, in 1989, 28 per cent of those questioned listed improving pay as the most important thing they thought trade unions should do. By 1994, that had changed dramatically. More than twice as many (37 per cent) wanted unions to concentrate on protecting jobs, against 15 per cent listing improving pay as their most important task. That change was also reflected in more than twice as many union members saying they believed unions should have a larger say over management's long term plans. "Job security is seen as a major concern," the report says.

But while work is shrinking for men, it is rising for women, a reflection of more part-time jobs, but also women having fewer children, delaying having them and are more likely to return to work after having a child.

☐ *Social Trends 1996*. HMSO: £35.95



Poet's corner: David Freckleton, exhibitions organiser at Glasgow's Mitchell Library, moves an engraving of Robert Burns in the new Burns Room, which opens today, the 200th anniversary of the poet's death. It will also house the Scottish Poetry Library Photograph: Colin McPherson

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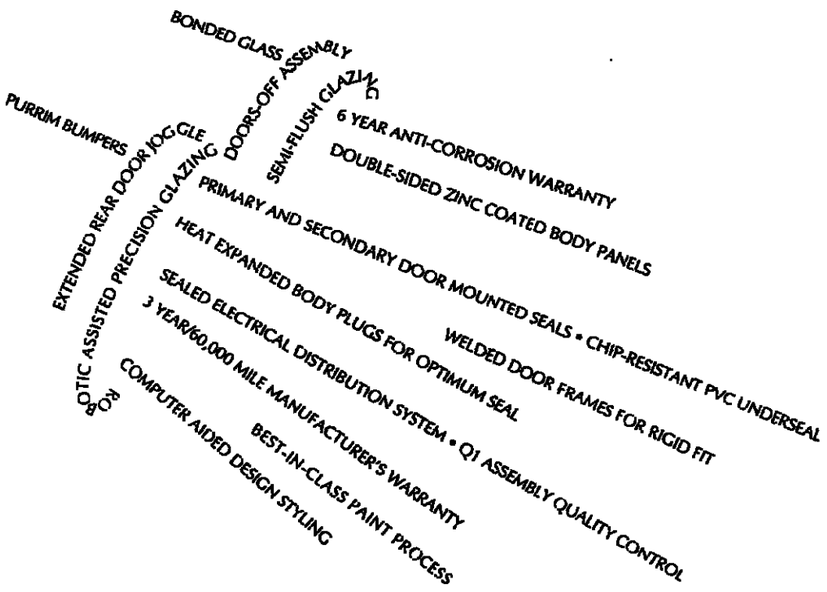

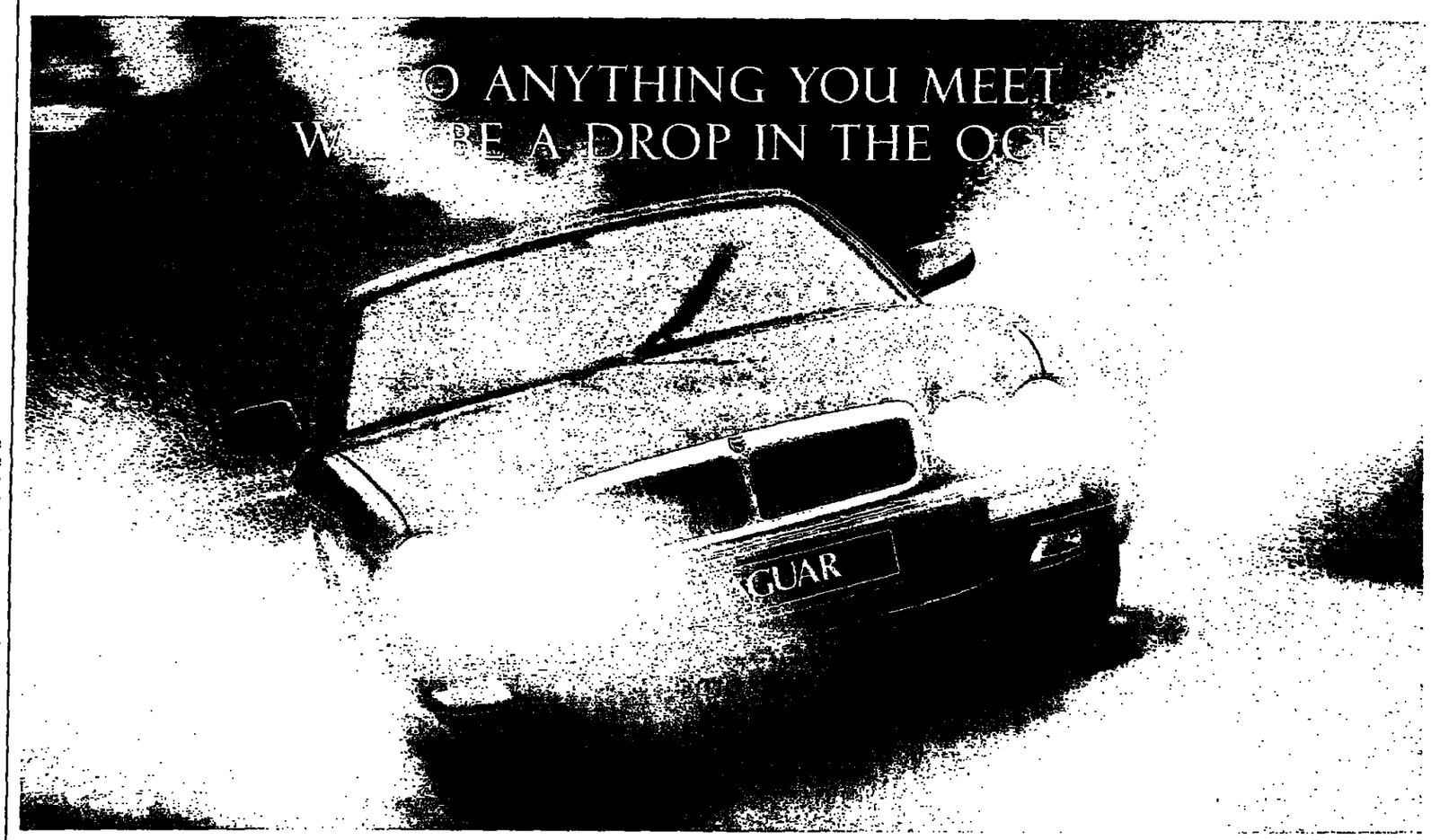

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'Arms to Iran' firm bypassed Cyprus embargo

CHRIS BLACKHURST
Westminster Correspondent

The defence company at the centre of the arms to Iran affair was also using Singapore as a way of avoiding a British embargo against supplying Cyprus, the Trade and Industry Select Committee was told yesterday.

A former director of the company was also accused by an MP of having a "selective memory" after denying he had not even heard factory rumours arms were destined for Iran.

A memorandum to senior executives of BMARC reveals Singapore was being used as a conduit for ammunition for 35mm guns – the same role it played in the supply of 140 naval guns to Iran in defiance of a United Nations blockade.

Jonathan Aitken MP, who sat on the BMARC board, has denied knowing Iran was the final destination for the naval guns order, codenamed Project Lisi.

In evidence to the select committee, which is investigating the Lisi deal, other ex-BMARC directors, William McNaught and Major-General Donald Isles, have maintained they did not know the artillery pieces were heading for Iran or that Singapore was a stop-off.

Dated 4 January 1989, the memo was sent by Mr McNaught, BMARC's managing-director, to five colleagues, including Major-General Isles. It details how the firm had failed to obtain an export licence for Greek Cyprus in 1987. As a way round the embargo, the ammunition was ordered by Oerlikon, BMARC's former Swiss parent, from the company's Grantham factory and sent to Singapore, from where it was shipped to Cyprus. At the same time as BMARC was using this device to arm Cyprus, shipments were being made to Singapore as part of Lisi.

The memorandum emerged as MPs quizzed Stephan Kock, another ex-BMARC director. In a session that became heated at times, Mr Kock downplayed Lisi, claiming it was not "a very large project". He admitted, though, it had been discussed. Board minutes did not include much mention of Lisi – possibly, it was revealed, because the minutes had been doctored. While Major-General Isles said he had heard factory rumours that the Lisi guns were going to Iran, Mr Kock said he had not heard them. He was accused by the MP Ken Purchase of having "a selective memory".

MPs repeatedly questioned Mr Kock about his own background in the defence industry, the armed forces and intelligence. He admitted keeping in contact with the security services while on the BMARC board.

After Mr Kock accused Gerald James, the former BMARC chairman who claims his fellow directors did know Lisi was bound for Iran, of "always looking for spooks under the bed", Martin O'Neill, the committee chairman, replied that Mr Kock was "a spook above the bed".

Mr Kock also denied the company ran "a secret order book", as alleged by Mr James. And he avoided answering a question by the MP Keith Hampson about the Cyprus memorandum. Instead, Mr Kock paid tribute to Government officials administering the export licensing system.

Save my bacon: The actress Joanna Lumley cuddling Babe, an eight-week-old piglet, as they arrived outside the Parliament yesterday for the launch of Compassion in World Farming's 1996 campaign to win a new status for animals as 'sentient beings' in European law Photograph: Edward Sykes

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Doughty performer stands her ground at despatch box

□ Harman keeps cool in face of Tory onslaught □ NHS 'safe only with the party that created it'

Harriet Harman last night proved to her Labour colleagues that whatever they might think of her judgement in sending her son, Joseph, to a grammar school, she is a doughty Commons performer under pressure.

Opening a Labour-initiated debate on the health service - scheduled before the schooling row broke - Ms Harman managed both to stifle Tory attempts to embarrass her and to mount an effective attack on "privatisation by the back door".

"This debate is about the crisis in our National Health Service," Ms Harman began. "It is about the hundreds of patients who wait on trolleys for emergency treatment. It is about the thousands who are denied the treatment they need."

The jeers of Tory backbenchers in a House unusually well attended for an Opposition debate, suggested otherwise. Noting the packed benches opposite him, David Shaw, Conservative MP for Dover, said Labour MPs had been banned from the Commons tea room.

Later Mr Shaw came perilously close to be ordered out of the chamber after shouting out that Tony Blair was a "hypocrite", but finally withdrew the accusation under pressure from the deputy speaker, Michael Morris.

The Labour leader, and his deputy, John Prescott, were on the crowded Opposition front bench to support Ms Harman,

Inside Parliament

Stephen Goodwin

while her husband, union official Jack Dromey, watched from the public gallery.

John Sykes, MP for Scarborough, was one of the first Tories to try to trip up the Labour health spokeswoman. "Isn't it a good thing there's no such thing as a grant-maintained hospital?" he asked. "Wouldn't she be in more trouble in that case?"

But Ms Harman said she was surprised Mr Sykes was not rising to complain to the Health Secretary, Stephen Dorrell, about the fact that 7,546 hospital beds had been closed in his own health region. "I believe that is what his constituents want him to be speaking up about in this House of Commons, rather than making cheap points."

Pressed by another Tory about her commitment to the "Conservative principles of choice", Ms Harman said she had not taken private health care, but that for many people, the treatment they wanted was no longer available on the NHS.

Ducking the question of whether Labour would actually abolish GP fund-holding, she said the party would bring together staff, patients and communities to create a consensus on future health care. "We will transfer the £1.5bn the Government wastes on bureaucracy to front-line services", and "end the unfair system where treatment is dependent on which GP is purchasing the health care, not on the clinical need of the patient".

"The Tory party in their hearts hate the NHS. The only safeguard for the NHS is the party which created the NHS - the Labour Party."

Stephen Dorrell hit back with a scathing attack on Labour's "hypocrisy". Just keeping within the rules of order for a health debate, he said: "The thing that makes us angry is the distinction between what they say and what they do."

The Opposition had put a "completely new political principle into action" – remaining silent to express "warm fraternal solidarity" with Ms Harman.

Mocking the failure of some Shadow Cabinet colleagues to support her, he said: "The reason Ms Harman is right and virtually all her colleagues on her own backbenches are wrong is that she has shown by her actions that she endorses the principles and values of a free and open society. That is important in the world of education and equally important in the world of health care."

Training chiefs' £1 liability attacked

CHRIS BLACKHURST

One of the Government's flagship initiatives for alleviating the problem of long-term unemployed young people was criticised yesterday by a powerful group of MPs.

The Commons Public Accounts Committee, which has a majority of Tory members, expressed "grave concern" that the directors of Training and Enterprise Councils, private companies set up with more than £1.4bn of taxpayers' money to manage young people's training, have a personal liability of just £1 each in the event of failure. The TEC in South Thames has already collapsed.

Stephen Byers, Labour's education and employment spokesman, called for changes in the accountability of TEC directors.

"It is simply unacceptable that people responsible for spending such large sums of public money have personal liability of just £1," he said. "Changes must be introduced which will ensure that directors are held liable for reckless spending."

In the case of South Thames, the chief executive, Michael Hanson, retired because of ill-health. The board agreed to make him an *ex gratia* payment of £30,375.

"Would the directors of South Thames have acted in this cavalier way if they could be held personally responsible for such spending?", Mr Byers asked.

Government in retreat over ID card proposals

HEATHER MILLS
Home Affairs Correspondent

A voluntary identity card scheme is to be introduced later this year, following a Home Office survey showing most people do not want to be compelled to carry identification.

Baroness Blatch, the Home Office minister, yesterday told a Commons committee that the Government had reached no final decisions over a national identity scheme. But sources confirmed that the threat of a Cabinet rift had already ruled out a costly compulsory scheme. Ministers were said to favour a voluntary scheme based on a photocard driving licence.

It also emerged that what was in any event a lukewarm commitment to a compulsory scheme has now been further watered down by the realisation that ID cards would have little or no impact on crime.

However, Lady Blatch insisted yesterday that a scheme would ease people's "fear of crime". They would believe it was "another shot in the armoury of the police in the fight against crime", she told the all-party Home Affairs Select Committee.

Jack Straw, shadow Home Secretary, immediately attacked the Government for its indecision. "First there was the hype, then silence and now a gradual retreat," he said.

The idea was warmly welcomed by the Tory grassroots when it was held up by Michael Howard, the Home Secretary, at the party conference two years ago as a major weapon in the fight against criminals, illegal immigrants and benefit scroungers.

Enthusiasm has since been more muted. Criticised as an attack on freedom, the proposals united the libertarian left and right – including those in the Cabinet. Even the police were ambivalent – unconvinced of the scheme's crime-fighting merits, and concerned about the potential for harassment claims.

There was also Treasury opposition – a compulsory scheme would have cost about £600m – and the evidence of studies from countries that have ID schemes indicating that they had very limited impact on crime, fraud, and illegal immigration.

A government consultation paper, published last May, outlined a number of possible options. A subsequent Home Office survey of over 2,600 voters found that just over half favoured some kind of scheme, but less than a third wanted a compulsory card. About 30 per cent were dead set against.

'Tartan tax' blow to Tories

JOHN ARLIDGE
Scotland Correspondent

The Tories' campaign against Labour's devolution proposals suffered a setback yesterday when Michael Forsyth, the Secretary of State for Scotland, was ordered to stop making claims that a Scottish parliament would impose a "tartan tax".

Sir Robin Butler, the head of the Civil Service, ruled that the phrase, which is the cornerstone of Mr Forsyth's campaign against a revenue-raising Edinburgh assembly, was "party political" and could no longer be used in official government communiqués.

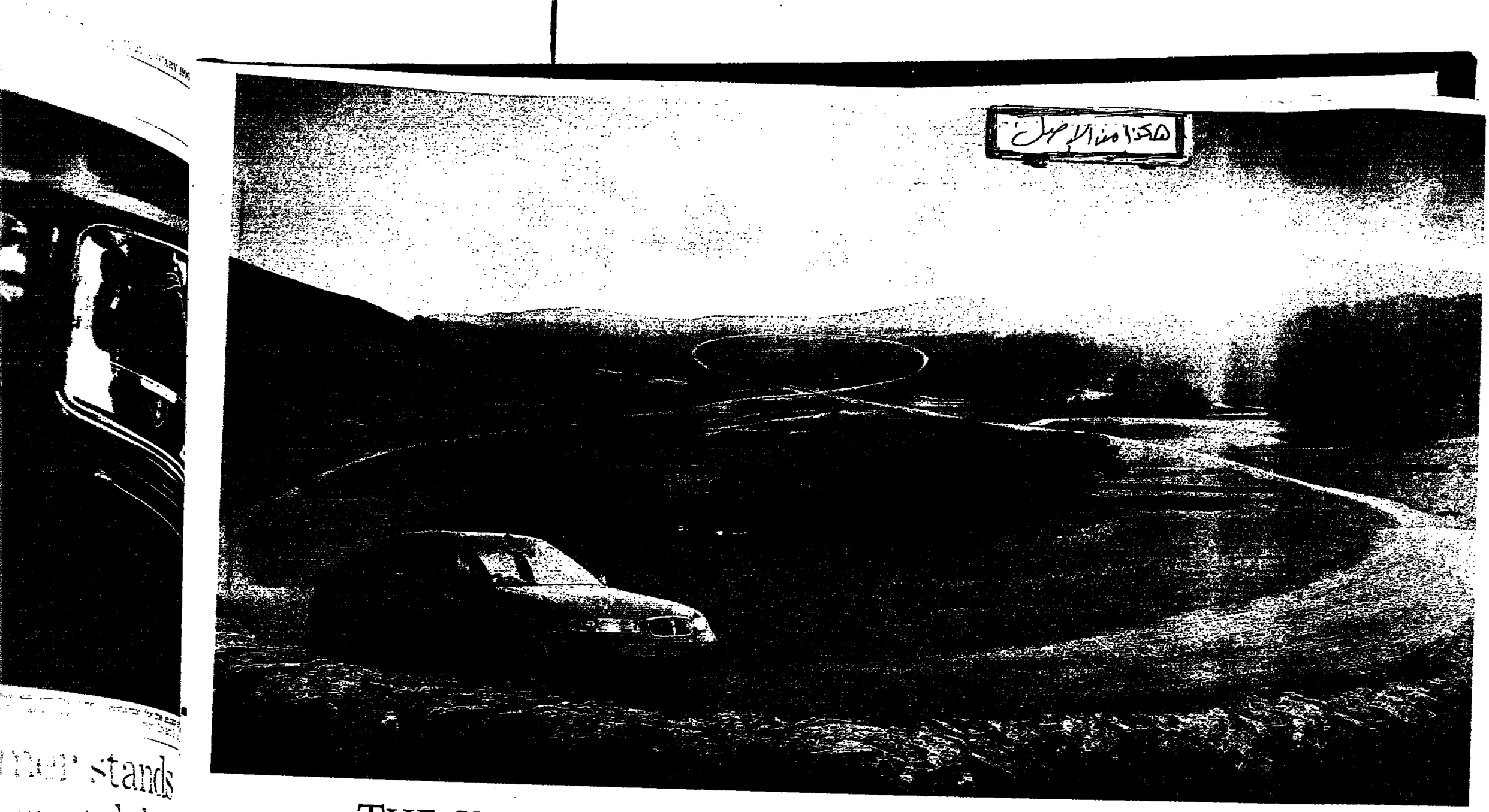
Tartan tax claims have appeared in numerous Scottish Office documents in recent weeks, angering Labour and the Scottish National Party, who have accused Mr Forsyth of using civil servants to peddle Tory propaganda.

Sir Robin's move comes a week after a bitter dispute over a speech by Mr Forsyth in which he used another Tory slogan – devolution converts "new jobs to nae jobs".

George Robertson, the shadow Secretary of State for Scotland, wrote to Sir Robin, the guardian of political neutrality in the Civil Service, asking him to rule whether the phrase "tartan tax" could be used in Scottish Office documents. Labour says a Scottish administration would not raise taxes.

After consultations with Sir Robin, Sir Russell Hillhouse, the permanent under-secretary at the Scottish Office, agreed that the phrase was partisan.

Mr Forsyth remains free, however, to refer to the tartan tax in remarks at government functions, in the Commons, and at Conservative meetings.



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Funding the arts: Virginia Bottomley is drawn into controversy over two theatres' competing claims for Arts Council grants

Stage set for battle of artistic survival

JOHN McKIE

Two neighbouring theatres are anxiously awaiting today's decision on grants to regional Arts Councils which could decide their future.

One, the Yvonne Arnaud theatre in Guildford, has been premiering works from major playwrights since the Second World War but faces closure in April if funds are not forthcoming.

The other, the Redgrave Theatre in Farnham, closed last January but wants to reopen with repertory productions soon. The latter enjoys some powerful support – not least that of its constituency MP, Virginia Bottomley, who also happens to be the Secretary of State for National Heritage.

The Redgrave Theatre, which put on home-grown repertory productions until it closed last January, has applied for a £740,000 grant, spread over the next three years, from South East Arts. The cash would be used for reopening and for new productions. Mrs Bottomley, the MP for Surrey South-West, has pledged support and the Redgrave organisers are optimistic about securing the money.

Meanwhile, the Yvonne Arnaud, a commercial playhouse which has premiered works by the likes of Alan Ayckbourn, Tom Stoppard and Alan Bennett, has already received a grant of £25,000 from South East Arts, but this is not likely to sustain it past April. Its owners are appealing to the body for urgent help.

"South East Arts have to justify why it is more important to reopen a theatre which died a year ago, with an annual audience of 50,000, than it is to keep open a live theatre with our track record, which has an audience of 160,000," said James Barber, artistic director of the Yvonne Arnaud.

The Guildford theatre already has the backing of some of the stars who have graced its stage in the past, including Dame Judi Dench, Peter Bowles and Millicent Martin. Indeed, Sir Derek Jacobi has told the *Farnham Herald*: "I would love to see a thriving Redgrave Theatre but the Yvonne Arnaud is receiving a bad deal from South East Arts, and I would question the level of funding for a theatre that is not up and running."

The Yvonne Arnaud has also argued that the Sybil Thorndike theatre in nearby Leatherhead receives an annual grant of £180,000, although it benefits from the involvement of celebrated theatrical figures Sir Peter Hall and Bill Kenwright.

The Redgrave plans to open by October. James Gatward, the former TVS chief executive who is helping present the Redgrave's case to South East Arts, said Mrs Bottomley had been "most supportive". He added that, as the local MP, she was keen for the theatre to survive.

South East Arts' chief executive, Chris Cooper, said no decision would be taken on the awards until early next week, after today's Arts Council grants to the 10 regional arts boards in England. SEA is the lowest-funded of the regional boards.

He admitted that the Redgrave reopening took precedence over the Yvonne Arnaud's priorities. "The Redgrave is the training ground for the very talented who are going to take over Hollywood in 10 years' time. There's very few of those theatres left. We are aware of the situation in Guildford but at the end of the day, they're about a commercial profit."

The outgoing Guildford MP, David Howell, said: "I have been in touch with the Heritage Secretary and had a sympathetic voice – but no action."

Both theatres have been involved in a slanging match in the local press. James Gatward said: "If the Yvonne Arnaud is saying they want the Redgrave money, we say, 'Bugger off'."

Writing on the wall: The Redgrave Theatre in Farnham, Surrey, which hopes to reopen with help from South East Arts Photograph: Geraint Lewis

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'Transplant hell' man loses out on damages

JOJO MOYES

Peter Sumners: 'Gutted' by a win-and-lose judgment

A man who was given a cancerous kidney in a transplant operation was yesterday awarded £21,286 in damages – but will not receive a penny and may have to pay legal costs because he was previously offered £25,000 in settlement.

Peter Sumners, 51, from Haywards Heath in West Sussex, underwent the operation in June 1986, but it was seven months before he was told that the organ was contaminated.

He told Mr Justice Collins at the High Court in London that he went through "hell" during months of dialysis and radiotherapy before he went into remission. The judge yesterday awarded Mr Sumners £17,500 for his pain and suffering in what he called a "unique case".

"It is difficult to imagine how appalling the knowledge that one has cancer must be, particularly where it has come in circumstances such as I have described," the judge said. "When, added to that, there is misdiagnosis, unnecessary radiotherapy and an apparent giving up on treatment, the trauma is even worse."

While the judge said he had "enormous sympathy" for Mr Sumners and wished he could make an exception in his case, he added: "To make an order in his favour would be my heart ruling my head. I would like to but I fear it wouldn't stand up if it was considered further."

The balance of the award was made up of miscellaneous expenses, including loss of earnings, bringing it up to £21,286 – £25,566 including interest.

But Mr Sumners's solicitor, Stephen Smith, said the award would be swallowed up by the court's order that Mr Sumners must pay the costs of the action after the beginning of March 1993, when Mid Downs Health Authority and Brighton Health Authority made the payment into court. He said an appeal would be considered against the £17,500 portion of the award as it was considered to be too low for the pain and suffering Mr Sumners experienced. After the judgment Mr Sumners said that he felt "gutted".

Last week, the judge said staff at the Royal Sussex County Hospital in Brighton "could not really have made greater blunders in the way they treated Mr Sumners once they realised that they had put in a potentially cancerous kidney".

But he ruled that the hospital was not negligent in failing to diagnose the kidney as cancerous, because of the speed at which transplants had to be done.

DAILY POEM

O, wert thou in the cauld blast

By Robert Burns

O, wert thou in the cauld blast
On yonder lea, on yonder lea,
My plaidie to the angry airt,
I'd shelter thee, I'd shelter thee.
Or did Misfortune's bitter storms
Around thee blaw, around thee blaw,
Thy bield should be my bosom,
To share it a', to share it a'.

Or were I in the wildest waste,
Sae black and bare, sae black and bare,
The desert were a Paradise,
If thou wert there, if thou wert there.
Or were I monarch o the globe,
Wi thee to reign, wi thee to reign,
The brightest jewel in my crown
Wad be my queen, wad be my queen.

Robbie Burns died 200 years ago this year, but it is his birthday on 25 January that has always been celebrated by the Scots. Burns, their radical, nationalist poet, has been depicted by the anniversary media as an angry young punk with revolutionary leanings, but his real contributions to his homeland were more gentle: his use of the Scottish dialect when it was regarded as too "low" for literature, and the preservation – a labour of great love – of a wealth of old Scottish songs and ballads.

US budget crisis: President's masterful State of the Union message allays market fears and boosts his hopes for re-election

Acclaim for Clinton as he woos Congress

RUPERT CORNWELL
Washington

Hours after President Bill Clinton's widely acclaimed State of the Union Address, the Republicans and the White House moved yesterday towards compromise on a stop-gap spending bill to avert another government shut-down this weekend and on a formula to increase the debt ceiling, preventing a threatened government default next month.

In a speech that effectively began his re-election campaign, Mr Clinton urged the Republican Congress to join him in passing those parts of a balanced budget plan on which both sides agreed. After the Speaker, Newt Gingrich, responded by offering a measure to lift the borrowing ceiling "as early as next week", the White House professed its "encouragement" at Mr Gingrich's words.

An increase in the $4.9bn (£3.1bn) ceiling, which Republican hard-liners have blocked in order to exert pressure on Mr Clinton to accede to a seven-year plan to balance the budget, assumed new urgency this week after Robert Rubin, the Treasury Secretary, warned the US would go into default on 1 March. The unprecedented move could cause turmoil on world financial markets.

Yesterday that prospect was receding, not least because Republicans were aware that Tuesday night unarguably belonged to Mr Clinton. Press and public reviews were overwhelmingly favourable. One instant poll afterwards registered 70 per cent public approval, while a two-to-one margin of Americans blamed the Republicans for the budget impasse.

The President urged Democrats and Republicans to put aside differences for a new "Age of Possibility" for America. By co-opting many Republican themes, from crime to "family values", he took dead aim at the crucial middle ground of US politics where the next election will be decided. Even Mr Gingrich conceded it was a "remarkably Republican speech".

"The era of Big Government" is over, Mr Clinton declared, in one of the few passages to draw cheers from Republicans. But, he added in an implicit dig at his opponents' heartless radicalism, "We cannot go back to the time when our citizens were left to fend from themselves." Mr Clinton produced no important legislative proposals. Instead he peppered his speech with exhortations to "stand together" and seek the "common ground".

By contrast it was Bob Dole, the Senate majority leader and Mr Clinton's most likely foe in November, who came across as crabby and partisan as he delivered the Republican response. Anxious not to be outflanked by conservative rivals, Mr Dole accused Mr Clinton of "élitism" and of being "held back by outdated values".

Mr Dole's spirits would not have been lifted by new opinion polls, showing advances by his chief competitor for the nomination, Steve Forbes. In New Hampshire, where the first primary takes place on 20 February, one poll puts him ahead by only eight points. In Arizona, which holds its primary a week later, the multi-millionaire magazine publisher is leading by a solid 39 per cent to 27 per cent.

Grumpy old men hand it to Bill

Washington – There was a special showing of Grumpy Old Men on Tuesday evening. Not the smash film with Jack Lemmon and Walter Matthau, but the Capitol Hill version, without a laugh in the script, featuring the Republican elders in Congress and starring Bob Dole – the Meanest Scowl in Town.

For students of politics as image, Bill Clinton's State of the Union address was a dream. There he was, the Husband of Hillary to be sure, but youthful, appealing, and above all projecting good cheer. True, on the rostrum behind him Vice-President Al Gore was doing his habitual impersonation of a Secret Service officer. But compared with the Republicans even the famously wooden Al came across as a bundle of fun.

Next to Mr Gore sat Newt Gingrich. Only once did the Speaker's countenance lighten, when just before the speech Mr Clinton handed him a sheet of paper. Earlier that evening, a television reporter had inquired of the Speaker what he would like the President to say. "Thank you and good night," came the reply. That was the mock text Mr Clinton handed him. Even Mr Gingrich, who has not had much to smile about of late, had to grin.

But that was the end of the festivities as far as Republicans were concerned. A few times they clapped. For the rest, if the cutaway television shots were any guide, they sat in a silence that was, well, just grumpy. A peevish Al D'Amato, chairman of the Senate Whitewater committee and Mrs Clinton's Congressional persecutor-in-chief, raised a faint smile as the President praised his wife in the gallery as a "magnificent mother, wonderful wife, and great First Lady".

Then the camera panned on to Senator Strom Thurmond of South Carolina, 93 years young and staring blankly ahead. And the instant Mr Clinton finished, many Republicans sprinted from the chamber rather than accord the courtesy of applause. But that was just a trailer for the main show.

Pity Bob Dole. Probably history will remember him as a man who should have been President, but wasn't. If so, the reason will be in part his age of 72, which would make him the oldest ever occupant of the White House should he win the election and which even long sessions under the tanning machine cannot conceal. But most damaging of all, he's grumpy.

As he officially responded on behalf of the Republicans, Mr Dole gamely did his best, littering his speech with words like "future", "children" and "youth" and trying to smile. Alas, even Walter Matthau on a bad day looks radiant compared to a smiling Bob Dole. Stiffly he stood there, an old man without vision, parroting lines about values and "getting the country back on track", unable to resist gibes at young Bill Clinton the "elitist".

A nation must have watched and wondered, Is that the best the Republicans have? Mr Dole remains the front-runner for the nomination. But if Tuesday night was a preview of the first debate of the campaign, the President won hands down. In politics, grumpiness doesn't pay.

Rupert Cornwell

Laughing matter: A light moment during the State of the Union session, when, before the address, Newt Gingrich was handed a mock text of Bill Clinton's speech, as Vice-President Al Gore claps Photograph: Reuter

Warning of Chinese attack prompts 'jitters' in Taiwan

STEPHEN VINES
Hong Kong

Renewed fears of a Chinese attack on Taiwan have been roused by a report in yesterday's *New York Times* that the Chinese government would launch a series of daily missile attacks against the island following the March presidential election.

Such a move, the *Times* said, would be designed to pre-empt moves to secure international recognition for the island's government. Peking views Taiwan as a renegade province. However, a senior US official said the Clinton administration had "no independent confirmation or even credible evidence" of such a plan, and China's foreign ministry called the report "totally groundless".

The warnings are reported to have been delivered by Chas Freeman, a former assistant secretary of defence who is among a group of former US officials regarded as "very old friends of China". Mr Freeman's contacts with senior Peking officials go back to the days when he acted as President Richard Nixon's interpreter during Nixon's ground-breaking visit to China in 1972.

Peking reacted with fury last year when President Lee Teng-hui of Taiwan made a so-called private visit to the United States, a move that appeared to foreshadow the end of Taiwan's diplomatic isolation. But the strength of the Chinese reaction seems to have drawn the United States back to its original "one-China" policy, which offers no scope for recognising the government of Taiwan. China, in turn, has been less aggressive in pursuing its claims.

Now, however, China appears to be worrying that President Lee will triumph in the first-ever democratic election for a Chinese head of state and that he will use his mandate to canvass international support for Taiwan in the US.

The report says that Mr Freeman conveyed China's concerns to Anthony Lake, President Clinton's national security adviser, on 4 January and that the matter was discussed at a White House meeting of non-government China specialists.

The plan, according to Mr Freeman, is for one conventional missile strike a day for 30 days, not to start a war but to warn the US to keep out of Sino-Taiwanese relations and to persuade President Lee to maintain a low profile.

Mr Freeman, who has previously criticised President Lee in public, confirmed the report. In Taiwan, where talk of Chinese military action always provokes jitters, officials said the report was unconfirmed, and could not provide a basis for comment.

However, tension between the two sides of the Taiwan Strait is higher now than at any time since the late 1970s, when the two sides last exchanged artillery fire. China last year launched a series of deliberately threatening military exercises off Taiwan's coast and the government in Taipei retaliated with a series of more modest military manoeuvres.

Meanwhile, rumours of preparations for war have multiplied, reaching a peak last November with reports that China had changed its criteria for authorising a military invasion of Taiwan, classifying the island as harbouring a "covert independence movement". Limited military action was justified, therefore, to prevent further breakaway moves.

Officially both the Chinese and Taiwan governments are committed to a policy of reunification but China fears that President Lee, the first native Taiwanese to head the island's government, is intent on drawing the two states further apart.

Much of the Chinese military pressure has been aimed at undermining confidence in President Lee but the crude methods of intimidation seem to have backfired and placed the President in an unbeatable position for the forthcoming presidential elections. China's best hope now is to look for ways to minimise his opportunities for capitalising on his position.

IN BRIEF

US 'blue beret' objector court martialed

Bonn — An American soldier who refused to don the blue beret of the UN peace-keeping forces in the former Yugoslavia was found guilty yesterday of disobeying a lawful order, **writes Imre Karacs**. Michael New, a 22-year old army medic serving in Germany, turned out for a parade in his regular US uniform as his unit set off for Macedonia last October. He argued that he had taken an oath of loyalty to the US, and not to the UN, which then commanded peace-keeping forces in the Balkans. He was given a bad-conduct discharge from the army. New is the first member of the US armed services court martialed for refusing to wear UN insignia on his uniform or to accept foreign command on a UN operation.

Ethiopian Jews in 'tainted blood' row

Jerusalem — Ethiopian immigrants were enraged yesterday to learn Israel's blood bank had for years been accepting their donations but disposing of their blood for fear of the HIV virus. The head of the country's central blood bank, Amnon Ben-David, confirmed a newspaper report that virtually all blood from Ethiopians was summarily destroyed without any tests. The newspaper showed a picture of a blood unit marked: "Do not use because donor is from Ethiopia". Adiso Masala, of the Organisation of Ethiopian Immigrants, said that of 60,000 Ethiopians in Israel, 300 were infected with the HIV virus. But the Health Minister, Ephraim Sneh, said the rate of HIV among the Ethiopians was 50 times higher than the general population. *Reuter*

Utah firing squad in dress rehearsal

Salt Lake City — Five marksmen practised firing on command and a prison worker played the part of a convicted killer as Utah conducted a dress rehearsal for its first execution by firing squad in 19 years. John Albert Taylor, sentenced to die for raping and strangling an 11-year-old girl in 1988, will be led out of a holding cell, strapped into a chair and shot through the heart just after midnight tomorrow. Taylor, 38, will be the first inmate to die by firing squad since Gary Gilmore in 1977. *AP*

Gaddafi discusses US Muslim role

Tunis — The Libyan leader, Muammar Gaddafi, held talks with the visiting US black activist Louis Farrakhan on the formation of an effective Black Muslim lobby in the US. Libya's official news agency Jana reported that Col Gaddafi and Mr Farrakhan discussed at their meeting on Tuesday "the situation of Muslims in America and the ways to unify, mobilise, and organise them in proper institutions with the aim of getting an important and an influential role in the next US elections". *Reuter*

Internet dodges ban on Mitterrand book

Paris — Police said yesterday they had paid an informal visit to a provincial French "cybercafe" after it fed a banned book on the late president François Mitterrand's battle with cancer into the worldwide Internet computer network. A police inspector in Besancon, 40 miles east of Dijon, stressed the visit was not part of legal proceedings. The Cafe Web put on the Internet the book by Mitterrand's doctor Claude Gubler, which says the president, who died of cancer on 8 January, lied about his illness for 11 years. *Reuter*

Chain reaction: A man stands shackled at Tokyo's Shinjuku station as police evict homeless people from the building after commuters complained Photograph: Reuter

Polish PM forced to resign over links with KGB man

ADRIAN BRIDGE
Central Europe Correspondent

Poland's Prime Minister, Jozef Oleksy, resigned last night after military prosecutors announced their intention to investigate allegations that he spied for Moscow for more than a decade. "In the name of reasons of state, I have decided to resign," Mr Oleksy said on Polish television. But he firmly reiterated his position that he is innocent.

Mr Oleksy, a former Communist, firmly denied the accusations, which centre around his long friendship with a former Russian diplomat who was simultaneously working as a colonel within the KGB.

In an interview published earlier this week, however, he conceded that the link had been "imprudent".

"I think I am guilty of a certain imprudence," Mr Oleksy told the weekly magazine *Polityka*. "I can see it very clearly now, but I did not see it that way at the time," he said.

The allegations against Mr Oleksy have dominated Polish political life since they first surfaced in a dramatic final week of Lech Walesa's presidency at the end of last year. According to the then interior minister, Andrzej Milczanowski, Mr Oleksy had passed information, including classified documents, to a KGB agent in Warsaw from the early 1980s until the time he became Prime Minister last March.

Mr Oleksy quickly confessed to having had a long association with the Russian diplomat Vladimir Alganov. But he denied any knowledge of Mr Alganov's KGB activities – or of having provided him with classified information.

For many Poles, the closeness of the relationship – regardless of whether any information was exchanged – has demonstrated a clear lack of judgement by Mr Oleksy. The centre-right opposition, spearheaded by the former President, Lech Walesa, has not surprisingly been baying for his blood. More worrying for the Prime Minister, many members of his own former communist Democratic Left Alliance (SLD) felt he should go.

"Mr Oleksy is being seen as a liability within his own party," said a Western diplomat, adding that many people regarded close contacts with Russian diplomats as having been "OK" until 1989, but not so afterwards.

A gleeful Mr Walesa yesterday said that in addition to Mr Oleksy resigning, the country should hold fresh parliamentary elections, not officially due until September next year.

Mr Walesa's successor, Aleksander Kwasniewski, another former Communist, has also indicated that early elections may be the only way out of this political crisis, which has almost totally eclipsed the first month of his presidency.

Gonzalez ally to be tried over hit squads

ELIZABETH NASH
Madrid

Amid the storms lashing Spain in recent days was a political thunderbolt that threatens to blow asunder Felipe Gonzalez's election chances and possibly wreck his party.

The Supreme Court is to try the former interior minister Jose Barrionuevo, a member of the Prime Minister's inner circle, for setting up a hit-squad against Basque separatists and financing it from ministry slush funds.

The charges, announced yesterday by the Supreme Court judge Eduardo Moner, bring this most serious of the scandals to have eroded the Socialist government's credibility nearer than ever to Mr Gonzalez. For the moment, he is backing his former minister to the hilt.

Mr Barrionuevo, who is on bail, is charged with illegal detention over the kidnap of a French businessman mistaken for an Eta member; with misuse of public funds; and with association with an armed gang, the Anti-terrorist Liberation Group, or Gal.

Mr Moner said "proven facts" pointed to Mr Barrionuevo as organiser of Gal and in particular its first act, the kidnapping of Segundo Marey. The former minister ordered Mr Marey to be held even after he was discovered to be the wrong man, apparently to put pressure on France.

The bombshell is a gift to the conservative Popular Party leader, Jose Maria Aznar, who, if he plays his cards right, may sail to absolute victory in general elections on 3 March.

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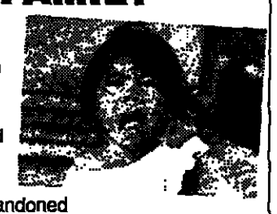

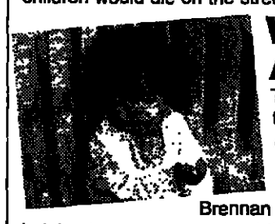

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Chechen rebels deliver hostages to safety

BRIAN KILLEN
Reuters

Novogroznensky — Chechen rebels yesterday released 42 civilian hostages seized two weeks ago in the raid in the neighbouring region of Dagestan which ended in a bloody showdown with Russian troops.

The hostages, looking tired but glad to be going home, left in a yellow bus from a two-storey school building in the eastern Chechen town of Novogroznensky.

The bus, which followed a convoy of cars with Dagestani officials and religious leaders, wound through a crowd of several hundred Chechens chanting "*Allahu Akhbar*" (God is greatest). Some people perched on trees to get a better view.

Most of the hostages said they had been well treated by the rebels and some exchanged warm farewells with their captors.

Some had been seized on 9 January, when the rebels herded 2,000 people into a hospital in the Dagestan town of Kizlyar to press their demands for Russian troops to be withdrawn from Chechnya after more than 13 months of conflict there. Others were captured in the village of Pervomayskoye near the Chechnya-Dagestan border, where the convoy of rebels and hostages was blocked and surrounded by Russian troops.

The Chechens are still holding some police commandos who were seized outside Pervomayskoye. They want to exchange them for rebels captured by the Russian forces.

The village was almost totally destroyed when the Russian troops stormed it. But a group of rebels broke out of the besieged village, through Russian lines, and took some of their hostages with them.

"They were good to us. We had no problems. It was like brother to brother. A new life began for us after we sat for three days under the bombing in Pervomayskoye," said Ruslan Magomedov, 23, a businessman from Kizlyar.

Another hostage, Anatoly Zdebsky, 25, said he was happy to be going back to his family and bore no grudges against the Chechens: "They kept us in various homes, looked after us and fed us well," he said.

The buses crossed the Chechnya-Dagestan border at about 5pm Moscow time in the direction of the Dagestani town of Khasavyurt, reported Tass news agency.

Before the release there was a meeting in the school attended by the Dagestani delegation and Chechen rebel leaders including the commander in chief, Aslan Maskhadov.Salman Raduyev, who led the rebel raid in Dagestan, was also there. A member of the Dagestani parliament, Gadji Makhachev, told the meeting that the group to be released were not really hostages. "These lads saved their lives," he said, referring to the fact that the rebels had taken them out of Pervomayskoye during the attack by the Russian forces. "The Chechens said we could take our people home. They are our neighbours."

Mr Maskhadov told the audience that the rebels were not bandits. "We are not terrorists. We condemn terrorism and banditry," he said.

■ Moscow — Six Russian soldiers were killed and two wounded in attacks by separatist rebels on Russian positions in Chechnya in the 24 hours up to yesterday afternoon. Interfax news agency reported that "illegal armed bands" had made 19 attacks in all, 13 of them in the capital Grozny.

Burundi misery as 7,000 refugees flee 'no-go' area

DAVID ORR
Uvira, Zaire

A ragged and barefoot group gathers around Leonard Niyizigama, backs hunched against the wind that whips across the dusty hillside. Occasionally one of the group nods or murmurs in agreement as the story unfolds. It is a drama in which they have all played a part, for they have all fled their homeland in similar circumstances and have suffered similar hardships.

"I and my family were living in Cibitoke," said Mr Niyizigama, glancing over his left shoulder towards the Burundian border, which lies about 10 miles away among the green-blue hills. "Then the army came. We heard they were looking for guerrillas but then they began killing ordinary people. ... I ran away with my wife and children ... We had to hide for many days in the forest. We crossed the River Rusizi at night because the soldiers shoot at people crossing during the day."

Mr Nihizigama and his family are among more than 7,000 Hutu peasants who have recently fled into eastern Zaire from the Burundian provinces of Cibitoke and Buhanza. In all, more than 100,000 Burundian refugees now languish in the Uvira region.

A man with his arm in a sling pointed to a scar on his arm. He said it was from a bullet wound he received when Burundian soldiers shot at him near the border. All the men and women in the group said they had lost friends or family members in attacks by the Burundian military. But Médecins sans Frontières personnel said they were seeing relatively few bullet wounds: most of the seriously wounded, they assume, are not making it across the Rusizi River.

These people scoff at the suggestion that they might go home. It is too dangerous, they say. There must be peace and justice before they can return. And the army must become properly integrated, with both Hutus and Tutsis in its ranks. For the moment, they say, they have no confidence in the government and, in any case, it is the largely Tutsi army that controls the country.

The north-western provinces have become a virtual no-go area. The Burundian military contends that its operations are directed at Hutu guerrillas who have recently become more organised, ambushing travellers and blowing up electricity and water installations. The evidence of the refugees turning up in Zaire, however, would seem to indicate that the army is far from discerning in its choice of targets.

Aid agencies, too, have suffered repeated attacks. Before Christmas, all the aid organisations, with the exception of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, pulled out of the region. "We are now moving back," said a World Food Programme spokesman, "... but until we can get some assurance from the local administrators, we cannot be sure that we are safe."

It is thought unlikely that Burundi will be consumed by the same kind of genocide as witnessed in neighbouring Rwanda in 1994, if only because the two ethnic groups have been largely segregated; the Hutus in the countryside and the Tutsis in the towns. However, neither is there any evidence that the slow-burning civil war that broke out after the assassination in October 1993 of Burundi's first elected Hutu president, Melchior Ndadaye, is about to stop. Since the assassination extremists from both sides have become embroiled in a conflict which the government, a coalition of Hutu and Tutsi parties, seems powerless to stop.

■ Ngara, Tanzania (Reuter) — A senior Tanzanian official said on Wednesday his country was allowing in 16,000 Rwandans fleeing ethnic violence in Burundi despite playing host already to hundreds of thousands of refugees. Brigadier-General Sylvester Hemedi, district commissioner for Ngara area, said the decision was a humanitarian one and did not mean the border with Burundi, closed last year, was officially reopened for refugees.

Scant hope: An exhausted Hutu woman, one of thousands of terrified Burundian refugees, sitting in a makeshift camp at Murama Photograph: AFP

Palestinian exiles start long trek home

PATRICK COCKBURN
Jerusalem

In 1972 Bassam Abu Sharif, a member of a militant Palestinian party, opened a booby-trapped copy of the *Diary of Che Guevara*, sent unexpectedly to him in the post. It exploded, tearing off three of his fingers, blinding him in one eye and destroying his hearing in one ear.

This week he was one of the first of what is expected to be a large number of members of the Palestinian resistance who will return to the West Bank and Gaza in the next few weeks.

Their return follows Israel's announcement on Saturday that all members of the Palestinian parliament-in-exile, the Palestine National Council, can return to the autonomous areas.

Israel wants the council to remove from its covenant the clause that calls for the destruction of Israel.

However, Nayef Hawatmeh, leader of the Democratic Front for the Liberation of Palestine (DFLP), said in Damascus that he was against returning under Israeli conditions. He called the Israeli offer a "studied plan to dismantle the PLO establishment".

"We are ready, leadership and members, to return home," said Mr Hawatmeh. "But that should not be under the conditions set by [Shimon] Peres," the Israeli Prime Minister. Speaking of the covenant Mr Hawatmeh added: "We refuse to recognise an Israel which does not recognise the right of the Palestinian people to self-determination."

Israeli officials said any return of Mr Hawatmeh, whose organisation launched repeated guerrilla raids on Israel, would speed up the disintegration of those Palestinian organisations opposed to the Oslo accords.

The return of long-exiled Palestinian leaders to the West Bank and Gaza is transforming Palestinian politics.

Mr Hawatmeh and his party were based primarily in the diaspora of Palestinian refugees in Lebanon, Syria and Jordan who lost their homes in what is now Israel in 1948. But it is the 2.2 million Palestinians who have gained autonomy in the West Bank and Gaza, not the 3 million who live in the rest of the Arab world who are benefiting from Oslo.

"The West Bank and Gaza will be the centre of Palestinian political life in future," said a Palestinian observer who has just returned from exile. Mr Hawatmeh never had much support in the occupied territories and the DFLP split five years ago. Along with the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP) of George Habash, Mr Hawatmeh's organisation did not take part in Saturday's election.

Yasser Arafat, now elected President of the new Palestinian authority, once depended on the refugee communities of the diaspora. In 1970 they fought for him in Jordan, after which he transferred to Lebanon. Thousands were killed in the Lebanese civil war and during the Israeli invasion. Many of them feel betrayed today.

Defeat in Lebanon and the start of the *intifada* in the occupied territories in 1987 began to make the West Bank and Gaza the decisive arena in Palestinian politics. In private Palestinian officials now acknowledge that Israel will not take back refugees from 1948.

Final election results show Palestinian voters liked articulate candidates likely to stand up to Mr Arafat. There were many votes for Hanan Ashrawi in Jerusalem, Saleh al-Tamari in Bethlehem and Haidar Abdel-Shafi in Gaza, who have criticised Mr Arafat. Powerful local families in Hebron, Nablus and Gaza whom Mr Arafat has cultivated all did badly. This shows voters might have supported the DFLP and PFLP, had they not boycotted the election.

Moscow to join rights grouping

TONY BARBER
Europe Editor

The Council of Europe, one of the most important institutions linking Western and Eastern Europe, is expected to admit Russia today despite reservations about President Boris Yeltsin's Chechnya crackdown. Although some members of the council's parliamentary assembly are critical of Russia's human-rights record there, most take the view that there is a better chance of encouraging change if Russia becomes the council's 39th member-state.

The Strasbourg-based body was established in 1949 to promote human rights and democracy. Originally exclusively West European, it expanded after Communism fell to include East European states, for which membership serves as a seal of approval for their new democratic systems.

The council's secretary-general, Daniel Tarschys, of Sweden, said the council would not hesitate to take Russia to task if its performance failed to come up to scratch. He said the council could suspend member-states, a fate that befell Greece during the 1967-74 dictatorship and Turkey after the 1980 military coup.

The council has been eager to embrace new members from Eastern Europe but has tried not to water down standards. Thus the rump Yugoslav state, comprising Serbia and Montenegro, had its "special guest" status withdrawn in June 1992 because of its role in fomenting the wars in Croatia and Bosnia.

Last year Russia's application was frozen over the Chechnya intervention, which has killed 20,000 civilians. The council assembly lifted the freeze after it appeared truce talks were making progress but violence has recently been rising again.

On Tuesday Mr Yeltsin said rejection would be interpreted as support for "Chechen terrorists". But Sergei Kovalyov, one of Russia's most respected human-rights campaigners, said the council should attach tough conditions on Chechnya in return for admitting Russia.

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Single currency: Doubts spark a 'credibility crisis'

Brussels fights to stem panic as EMU totters

SARAH HELM
Brussels
TONY BARBER
Europe Editor

Doubts about the timetable and conditions for the creation of a European single currency rose to fever pitch yesterday.

Valéry Giscard d'Estaing, the former French president, joined the ranks of senior pro-European politicians who have warned that imposing rigorous EMU conditions during an economic downturn could damage European economies and the stability of the European Union itself.

The European Commission was yesterday desperately trying to shore up confidence in the plans to merge leading EU currencies by 1999. But the Commission has been infuriated by the remarks earlier this week of its former President, Jacques Delors, who suggested that the target date set by the Maastricht Treaty in 1991 might have to be abandoned.

There was also consternation at the remarks of Carlos Westendorp, the Spanish Foreign Minister, who said there was a secret understanding between European governments that EMU could not go ahead with France, Germany and the Benelux countries alone. Unless one other large country – Britain, Spain or Italy – was prepared to join by 1999, the EU would have to "stop the clock" on the whole project, Mr Westendorp said. "We are in a situation of a credibility crisis in the entire project."

At a packed press conference in Brussels yesterday Jacques Santer, President of the European Commission, attempted to hold the line, arguing that stopping the clock would "not stop the 21st century", and saying it was "irresponsible" to sow the seeds of doubt.

However, Mr Santer suggested for the first time that the Commission might consider a review of the EMU membership rules, as proposed by Mr Giscard d'Estaing. Under the plan put forward by the former French president the economic performance demanded of countries wishing to join EMU could be relaxed if the economic cycle was heading downwards. Such a plan would run into stiff opposition from Germany.

Mr Santer's aides were yesterday reported to be "spitting blood" over Mr Delors's intervention. "The view is that he is the guy who got us into this trouble. It was he who proposed such rigid criteria. If there is any finger-pointing to be done it should be at him," said one official.

This week's crisis – sparked by poor economic figures and forecasts in Germany and France – has revealed for the first time that European leaders are beginning actively to examine mechanisms for delaying monetary union. Some experts in Brussels are discussing whether there is a mechanism for calling a delay under the existing Maastricht treaty. Commission officials are currently drawing up a legal opinion which, sources say, will affirm that there is no means of calling a delay without rewriting the Maastricht treaty.

The EU is not due to name participating countries until early 1998, and the decisions will be made on the basis of 1997 economic performance. For this reason, it is unlikely that an announcement delaying or revising the timetable is imminent.

Adopting the Giscard approach – relaxing the EMU conditions rather than the timetable – would mean that countries would not be obliged to bring their budget deficits to 3 per cent of GDP or below in 1997, but could allow them to run slightly higher. Such a liberal interpretation would favour many countries that are having trouble reducing their deficits in time, notably France, although Germany also overshot the target last year.

But Germany's Finance Minister, Theo Waigel, has set out conditions so diametrically opposed to those of Mr Giscard d'Estaing that it is hard to see how they could be reconciled. He says governments using the Euro currency should ideally run deficits of no more than 1 per cent of GDP, should be fined if they break the rules, and should be expelled from the single-currency arena if they are persistent offenders.

Still, it appears that a frantic search is on for ways to prevent the collapse of the 1999 timetable. "If we fail, I fear we will start an irreversible disintegration process," said Belgium's Prime Minister, Jean-Luc Dehaene.

Leading article, page 14

Power to the people: Repairing a makeshift generator on the Drina river yesterday, as life returns to the Bosnian enclave of Goradze Photograph: AP

EU officials approve ban on veal crates

KATHARINE BUTLER
Brussels

Detailed proposals for a ban on veal crates were cleared by the European Commission yesterday but face tough French-led opposition when they go before agriculture ministers for approval next month.

Brussels officials fear that with Italy, one of the big veal-producing nations, holding the EU presidency until July, agreement could be stalled until the autumn.

Animal rights groups have already complained that the proposals do not go far enough fast enough, but yesterday's agreement nevertheless represents a breakthrough for campaigners. British protesters have waged the most relentless campaign, disrupting the live export trade to highlight the treatment of calves shipped to France, Belgium and the Netherlands.

The EU Agriculture Commissioner, Franz Fischler, who drafted the plan, has had to bow to producer lobbying with a 10-year transition period, but is emerging as more sympathetic to animal welfare concerns than any of his predecessors.

The Commission yesterday confirmed the approach outlined last month, which calls for a ban on new crates from January 1998. Farmers who are already using crates will have until 2008 to switch to loose housing.

The Commission warned it will soon issue new rules forcing producers to vary calves' diet; milk feed used to guarantee white meat will have to be supplemented with iron.

Yesterday Mr Fischler explained the 10-year delay as striking a balance between campaigners' demands and stability in the markets. However, the fate of the proposals depends on the extent to which France, the biggest veal producer, can muster support in the Council of Ministers. Italy may seek a compromise if producers can be promised compensation.

German belts tighten as jobless total passes 1929

IMRE KARACS
Bonn

Battered by rising unemployment, workers, employers and the German government yesterday joined forces in an effort to halve the number of jobless by the year 2000.

After long talks at Chancellor Helmut Kohl's office, the three sides unveiled a pact to create jobs, cut the welfare state, reduce taxes and implicitly help Germany meet conditions for the creation of a single European currency in 1999.

"We have an accord which lays out principles upon which we can work to form a consensus and create better conditions for increasing employment," said Günter Rexrodt, the Economics Minister.

Although the package will not be released until next week, officials indicated their attention will focus on reducing the employers' burden. Social security contributions are to be cut over six years, mirrored by a reduction in the welfare budget. There will be help for medium-sized enterprises and growth will be stimulated by infrastructure projects funded by local authorities. Employers agreed to increase apprenticeships by 5 per cent, curtail overtime and create more part-time jobs.

The unions are paying a heavy price. By agreeing to short-term contracts for new employees, they are giving up job security. They are also sacrificing workers' traditional right to expect wage rises above the annual inflation rate, which employers say has made them the most expensive in the developed world. Much of industry's trouble is ascribed to a two-year pay rise at twice the inflation rate, awarded to the biggest union, IG Metall, after strikes last year.

Kohl: Benefits must be cut

But IG Metall's leader, Klaus Zwickel, has since accepted the link between wage levels and unemployment, and has proposed a pay freeze in exchange for a pledge by the engineering industry to create 330,000 jobs.

His proposal for an "Alliance for Jobs" between labour and capital was the catalyst for yesterday's breakthrough, described by one minister as "unparalleled in Europe".

The workers also implicitly accepted cuts in the welfare state. Unemployment benefits are to be reduced by 3 per cent each year. Although the unions staved off attempts to abolish the generous early-retirement schemes, the government has won the battle to raise the normal pensionable age.

The pact comes amid apocalyptic predictions of a crash on a Weimar scale. Unemployment, expected to reach 4 million within the next month, has passed the 1929 level. Forecasts for growth hover barely above 1 per cent. Almost every day there are more lay-offs. Daimler-Benz, the flagship of German industry, reported earlier this week losses of 6bn marks (£2.6bn) for 1995. About 8,000 workers at a Dutch subsidiary and 1,200 in Germany are about to land in the dole queue.

Now industry has got an agreement that it hopes will reverse its fortunes. But it seems inevitable that the government's budget will be stretched for some time to come, and will exceed the target set by the Maastricht treaty for European monetary union.

City Comment, page 17

French union threatens more action against welfare reform

MARY DEJEVSKY
Paris

There were fears yesterday of renewed labour unrest in France as the CGT trade union – one of those at the forefront of the strikes last November and December – called for a national "week of action" starting on 5 February. The union said it wanted to force the complete withdrawal of the government's plans for welfare reform.

The franc immediately fell at the news; the success of the retrenchment plans is essential to French hopes of joining the European Monetary Union by the 1999 timetable.

The CGT's call came on a day when the government put into place the first main elements of its controversial reform, approving two sets of measures designed to restore the welfare system to financial soundness. A third element, the constitutional amendments required to give parliament ultimate responsibility for welfare spending, should be approved today.

Both the union's call to arms and the details of the measures seemed to give the lie to the view, canvassed in the French media, that the intended overhaul of the welfare system had been emptied of all its worth by the compromises forced on the Prime Minister, Alain Juppé.

As the price for securing an end to the strikes, Mr Juppé conceded almost all aspects of the reform that lay outside the immediate control and restructuring of health and welfare spending. He abandoned the review of public sector conditions and pensions, postponed a reform of income tax, shelved the restructuring plan for the national railways and approved more money for universities.

In subsequent compromises, the doctors forced the withdrawal of a tax of 1 franc on all prescriptions they issued; opposition from inside the majority Gaullist coalition then forced a month's postponement in the introduction of a new tax to pay back the accumulated debt of the welfare system and the abandonment of plans to tax family allowances.

What remains, however, is not inconsiderable. The constitutional amendments provide for parliament to have the last word on welfare spending, rather than a joint committee made up mainly of trade union and employers' representatives. At present, the government sets spending guidelines for the committee, but no more. In future, whatever ceiling is set should be enforceable by parliament.

Parliament has insisted on oversight of the welfare system's revenue, as well as its spending. The receipts, which amount to 118bn francs (£16bn) – more than the state budget – are the province of the joint welfare commission.

There are to be financial sanctions on doctors who spend beyond the budget limits set by the government. The freeze on family allowances for 1996 was also confirmed.

But it is the special tax to repay the welfare debt – known as the RDS (*remboursement de la dette sociale*) – that will come as the greatest shock and could fuel the unions' call for action. The RDS comes into force next month: a 0.5 per cent levy on all income.

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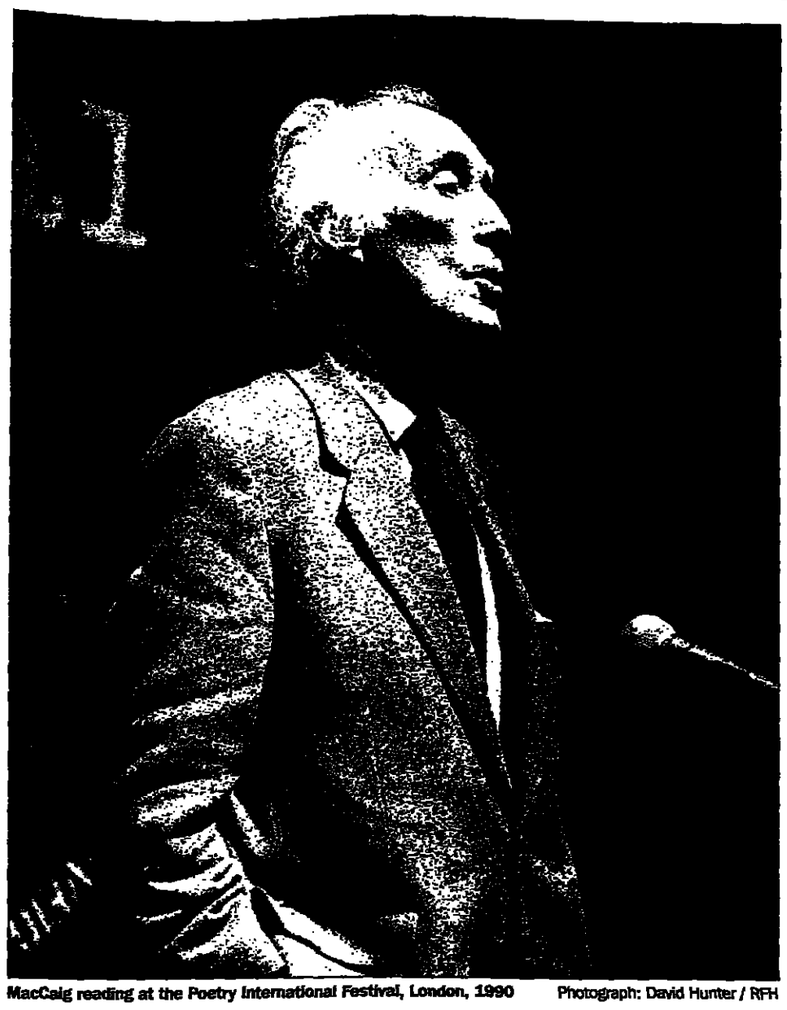

MacCaig reading at the Poetry International Festival, London, 1990 Photograph: David Hunter / RFH

Norman MacCaig

Joe, the young barman in the Auld Clachan (not one of the howffs which MacCaig frequented) said when I showed him the front-page news, "I guess he'll be more famous now that he's deid." It was typically modest of Norman MacCaig not to die on Burns's birthday, but good, if a death can be good, that it came in a week when people need reminding that Scotland has other great poets.

Joe went to one of the few schools in Scotland which MacCaig did not visit, under the Scottish Arts Council Writers in Public scheme. While auld wifies on the Edinburgh buses have been mourning the loss of the city's special poet, there are kids all over Scotland who studied MacCaig's poetry for exams but, more importantly, saw this ravaged Caesar stride into their lives and read perfect poetry to perfection.

I don't know if Ali Smith, the brilliant young short-story writer, first encountered him that way, but when Joy Hendry gathered together the tributes of scores of Scottish writers to celebrate Norman MacCaig's 85th birthday last year, Smith, who lives in Cambridge now, came up with one of the best. "Whenever I travel to the rail track home / I can't help it, I think of that casual MacCaig poem / The one where he's sitting smiling to himself on the London/Edinburgh train / soaring North, yes, here we go, here it comes again."

Scotland has three languages for poetry. MacCaig's was the English of Edinburgh, where he was born, and became a primary-school teacher, never aspiring to be greater, in a worldly sense, than that, though later both Edinburgh and Stirling Universities were honoured to have him on their staff, talking to students about writing with that aversion to bullshit which was his hallmark. The surprise was that this elegant, modest man was the closest friend of King Bullshit, Hugh MacDiarmid. They were diametrical opposites. MacDiarmid wrote huge sprawling poems about everything under the sun, escpecially politics and Anglophobia. MacCaig, a pacifist who suffered for his principles in the Second World War detained in Wormwood Scrubs, wrote frequently, with vast affection, before and after MacDiarmid's death, about his tankie friend. But MacCaig's politics, what you see in his verse, were those of the independent individual. They are short poems. Each makes, incisively, its point. The affinity, as many have pointed out, is with Herbert and Holub and other great poets of post-war Eastern Europe.

Hard work as a primary-school teacher. Weekend evenings in Milne's Bar, in Rose Street, by Hanover Street, just off Princes Street, by the Mound. There he formed one of a legendary quadrumvirate: MacDiarmid, if he was up from Biggar, Sydney Goodsir Smith, and Robert Garioch. The other three wrote, or had written, in Scots. They were all very much aware of the great Gaelic poet Sorley Maclean. In MacCaig's verse, you hear, enunciated or echoed, the three leids. And the substratum is Greek and Latin. He studied Classics at Edinburgh, after going to that school steeped in Classics, the Royal High. He talked about the Celtic feeling for form which he derived from Gaelic forebears, not, usually, about that grounding. But he wrote, in a poem called "Aesthetics", "Words with Greek roots / and American blossoms / have taken over the pretty garden."

Summers in Lochinver. Suilven, his special mountain. Fishing, walking. "I look up / at the eagle idling over / from Kylescu / I look away / at the shattering waterblink / of Loch Cama." Sorley Maclean wrote that MacCaig had given the Sutherland landscape new meaning. He honoured his Gaelic grannies in very beautiful English.

The career was extraordinary. I am tempted to write "by-ordinar". One of the things which MacCaig confessedly loved about MacDiarmid was the old man's rescue of Scottish expressions. MacCaig was into his thirties before he published two books of poems. These belonged to the Neo-Apocalyptic School, rampant on the "Celtic Fringes" in the 1940s. Later, he disavowed them to the extent that one fancied that only an innate respect for scholarship prevented him destroying the copies lodged in the National Library of Scotland.

As that school went, they weren't bad. He came into his own, though, in his forties, with *Riding Lights*, published in 1955. At this point he might be, and was, mistaken for a Scottish relative of the Movement. He wrote, Celtically, in formal measures. Another book in the Fifties, and acclaim. Then the verse relaxed. Five books in the Sixties, increasingly deploying that throwaway-seeming free verse. Five later ones, written at an age when most poets have given it up for golf. The *New Collected Poems*, of 1990, did and did not round off a reputation. Even after that, folk young and old in Edinburgh (and I must add, Glasgow and Inverness) listened avidly for the itch of his scribble.

MacCaig had no religious convictions, though his poetry is infused with the seriousness of the Presbyterian tradition. He had no party politics, though rumour insists that he voted SNP. MacDiarmid blurts it all, wonderfully, up front. MacCaig's messages are about quiet decency, in quiet places.

His place in Scottish literature is unique, as the best recent writer in English, pure English. The achievement wins praise where you don't expect it. I was out on the tiles a few months ago with a young skinhead Scottish writer domiciled on what I suppose we will come to call the Irvine Welsh Heritage Trail. He surprised me by expressing his utter love of MacCaig's verse. We deplored together the fact that MacCaig was in failing health, never quite himself again after the loss of his much-loved consort, Isabel. We plotted to surprise him with a bottle of whisky in his home in Leamington Terrace. We never did it. I regret that. I offer, too late, this poem: "Your death is beyond belief / which you never had, anyway / It comes upon one as a private grief / – the ultimate enemy.

Angus Calder

Norman Alexander MacCaig, poet: born Edinburgh 14 November 1910; FRSL 1965; Fellow in Creative Writing, Edinburgh University 1967-69; Lecturer in English Studies, Stirling University 1970-72, Reader in Poetry 1972-77; OBE 1979; ARSA 1981; FRSE 1983; Queen's Gold Medal for Poetry 1986; married 1940 Isabel Munro (died 1990; one son, one daughter); died Edinburgh 23 January 1996.

Léonor Fini

In the 17th century Léonor Fini would have been burnt as a witch. Surrounded by cats, and with feline eyes herself, she exuded what her one-time lover Max Ernst described as "Italian fury, scandalous elegance, caprice and passion." In photographs you would take her for beautiful in the manner of Bianca Jagger but, according to the American art dealer Julian Levy, she was not a beauty as such, in that "Her parts did not fit well together: head of a lioness, mind of a man, bust of a woman, torso of a child, grace of an angel, discourse of the Devil . . ."

Levy confirms my belief that if she had been born in the age of the extra teat and the familiar, this lady *was* for burning. "Her allure," he says, "was an ability to dominate her misfitted parts so that they merged into whatever shape her fantasy wished to present from one moment to the next." You can almost hear the faggots crackle.

Léonor Fini was of mixed Spanish, Italian, Argentinian, and Slavic blood, a formidable genetic cocktail. She was born in Buenos Aires in 1908 but grew up in Trieste. Her formal education was, as might be imagined given her independent and imperious temperament, fragmentary, but she had the run of her uncle's large library in Milan and also travelled widely in Italy and Europe visiting all the museums and taking in such then unfashionable painters as the Mannerists, a school later reflected in her own work. In reproduction she was to add Beardsley, the German Romantics and the British Pre-Raphaelites – all evidence of a Surrealist eye.

Her facility was precocious. By the time she was 17 she was already painting commissioned portraits. It was however in 1936 when she moved to Paris and became friendly with Ernst, the Eluards, Brauner and others, that she began to paint Surrealist images and to draw close to the movement. Close but not of. Like her greater contemporary Frida Kahlo, Fini refused to bend her knee before André Breton, and declined to accept the iconic role of child-woman or to accept his belief in *l'amour fou*, the monogamist obsession with one person as opposed to bisexual narcissism. She did however exhibit with the group as a kind of fellow traveller.

For Whitney Chadwick, the feminist author of that remarkable and very carefully titled book *Women Artists and the Surrealist Movement* (1985), she is a hero, as indeed are any of the women Surrealists who failed to be seduced by Breton's good manners and formidable charisma. He in his turn was shocked – for he was in many ways extremely puritanical – by her sometime scandalous behaviour and her fondness for the company of homosexuals (Breton was for whatever reason a ferocious homophobe).

How good an artist was she? Not a great one, certainly, but a very interesting one. There are echoes of de Sade (at one point she illustrated his *Justine*) but it is de Sade for *Vogue*. Even in her most extreme imagery Fini remained totally in control. In 1949 for example she painted a picture called *The End of the World*, an apocalyptic enough subject, you might have thought. It shows a beautiful young woman up to her breasts in black swampy water on which float the skulls of various creatures under a red sunset. I have my suspicions that this may have its origins, given Fini's enthusiasm for the Pre-Raphaelites, in Holman Hunt's *The Scapegoat*, but, whereas Hunt's vision is tragic if slightly absurd, Fini's, as so often, is rather camp. The young woman's hair for example has obviously just been set by a fashionable Parisian crimper. The swamp and the dead animals, while suggesting putrefaction, in no way imply the stench of decay. On the contrary one suspects it is all more likely to smell of Schiaparelli's "Shocking", for which Fini designed the bottle in the shape of a naked female torso. She was also a very talented illustrator in the glossy magazines.

Léonor Fini was indeed obsessed with death, but somehow the spectator is not at all alarmed by her depictions of it. That astute critic the late Robert Melville described one of her corpses as "a bright green cadaver daintily spotted with magenta blood". Even death is turned "all to prettiness and favour".

Yet there's nothing wrong with camp, after all, "the lie that tells the truth", and especially in her Sapphic paintings Fini achieved high camp of the first order. While she claimed categorically not to be a lesbian but open to everything, the temperature rises only when two of her elegant and immaculate girls are involved. On the other hand her men (or, to be more accurate, youths) are balletic and androgynous, lounging about lethargically, toyboys in a precise sense. It is the tall and seriously beautiful women, more often than not self-portraits, who one feels will direct or have directed the action.

Her erotic masterpiece is without doubt *The Train Journey*. It's based on a beautiful calm but charged 19th-century picture by Augustus Egg of two almost identically dressed girls facing one another across a railway carriage. The blind is up, its tassel swinging to suggest the train is in motion. In Fini's version the blind, with its frieze of cupids, is down. One girl, in Melville's perfect description, "while enclosing her unisex lover between her legs, graciously assumes the air of a victim and has neatly freed one breast from her corselet to imply that it has been forcibly uncovered . . ." This interpretation could be a projection of his fantasy but, looking again at the picture, I suspect not. Anyway, it's a wonderful erotic image.

Léonor Fini has died at the age of 87 but it's impossible to imagine her old. She will always be, for those of us who admired her, the wild, raven-haired, ill-proportioned beauty who haunts her pictures. The lethal yet irresistible sphinx, the vampire we would most like to visit us.

George Melly

Léonor Fini, artist: born 30 August 1908; died 18 January 1996.

Self-portrait by Fini, oil on canvas, 1942-43; from Whitney Chadwick, *Women Artists and the Surrealist Movement* (Thames & Hudson)

Alice Acheson

Acheson: flinty

Alice Acheson, the widow of Dean Acheson, Secretary of State to President Harry S. Truman from 1949 to 1953, was a handsome, elegant lady of immense charm. She was also a talented painter in oil and water-colour who exhibited in many American galleries and museums. Her subjects included Washington scenes as well as portraits and landscapes of foreign countries which she and her husband had visited over the years.

She was of flinty material, not afraid of telling Winston Churchill that his palette was "too bright" or Henry Kissinger that it was the Achesons' dinner time and that he must finish his discussion with Dean. She was aged about 85 when she was threatened near her home in Georgetown by a youth with a gun. He demanded that she should hand over her purse, containing a substantial amount of money she had just withdrawn from the bank to buy Christmas presents. She immediately boxed his ears, telling him that he should be ashamed of menacing an old lady in broad daylight.

Alice Stanley was the daughter and granddaughter of artists. Her grandfather, John Mix Stanley, was renowned for depicting American Indian life in the Wild West. Her mother was a water-colourist who encouraged her daughter, growing up in Detroit, to start painting at a very early age. Alice went on to study art at Wellesley College, in Massachusetts, where one of her friends was Dean Acheson's sister Margaret. This friendship, according to Alice's son David Acheson, was the attraction of opposites. "Alice Stanley was a classic brunette beauty, artistic, reserved, raised in a Midwest family of strong independence and high regard for education. Margaret, or Margot, was a flamboyant, glamorous, beautiful redhead who regarded social conventions as testing obstacles put in the way of talented people to overcome."

Margot Acheson invited Alice Stanley to visit the home of her British-born father, Bishop E.C. Acheson, in Middletown, Connecticut, where Stanley met her future husband. They were married shortly before her graduation, and moved to Washington, for Dean Acheson had become the private secretary to Justice Louise Dembitz Brandeis of the Supreme Court. Early in her married life she became a professional painter, at first mostly in water-colours, and then branching out into oils. By the late 1930s she had exhibited at the Corcoran Museum and the Phillips Collection in Washington, and at numerous other galleries around the United States, and had been included in at least one major travelling exhibition.

During the Second World War, she abandoned painting to head the American Women's Voluntary Service Group, training women to work on Maryland farms. (The Achesons had bought a farm in Maryland in the 1920s, from where she regularly rode to hounds.) She also taught drawing and painting to wounded soldiers.

During the time that Dean Acheson was Secretary of State she continued to paint, but gave up exhibiting, not wishing to trade on his fame. She played an important supporting role to him, and much of her time was taken up with travelling and receiving political visitors to Washington.

Alice Acheson was a fanatical Scrabble player, and would corral any visitor to join her in a game. She was proud of the fact that she had once beaten Queen Frederika of Greece playing Scrabble in French.

Some time back Mrs Acheson, like occasional other ladies, shaved a year off her age, but about four years ago, as her hundredth birthday approached, she went back to her true age, and enjoyed the celebratory party her family gave her last summer.

Leonard Miall

Alice Caroline Stanley, artist: born Charlevoix, Michigan 12 August 1895; educated Wellesley College; married 1917 Dean Gooderham Acheson (died 1971; one son, two daughters); died Washington DC 20 January 1996.

Births, Marriages & Deaths

DEATHS

NICHOLS: Kenneth John Heastey. On 24 January, peacefully at King Edward VII Hospital for Officers. Beloved husband of Pamela and dearly loved father, grandfather and friend. Private family funeral. Thanksgiving service to be announced later.

FUNERAL ARRANGEMENTS

FELLOWS: Howard Alwyn. The Service of Thanksgiving will take place at All Saints Church, Sproughton, Suffolk, on Monday 29 January at 3pm. Family flowers only please, but if desired donations towards respiratory research payable to Dr Russell Hall may be sent to Farthing, Singkton and Hastings, 650 Woodbridge Road, Ipswich IP4 4PW.

IN MEMORIAM

MATTHEWS: T. J. (née Davall). 25 January 1992. In loving memory. Peter, Clio and Ella.

Announcements for Gazette BIRTHS, MARRIAGES & DEATHS (Births, Adoptions, Marriages, Deaths, Memorial services, Wedding anniversaries, In Memoriam) should be sent in writing to the Gazette Editor, The Independent, 1 Canada Square, Canary Wharf, London E14 5DL, telephoned to 0171-293 2011 (24-hour answering machine 0171-293 2012) or faxed to 0171-293 2010, and are charged at £6.50 a line (VAT extra). OTHER Gazette announcements (notices, functions, Forthcoming marriages, Marriages) must be submitted in writing (or faxed) and are charged at £10 a line, VAT extra. They should be accompanied by a daytime telephone number.

Forthcoming marriages

Mr W .D. Symington and Miss J. P. Booth

The engagement is announced between William, elder son of Mr and Mrs D.A. Symington, and Juliet, daughter of Sir Christopher Booth and Dr Lavinia Loughridge

Mr C. J. Wilkins and Miss M. S. Hamilton

The engagement is announced between Christopher, son of Mrs Claire Wilkins, of Haslemere, Surrey, and Madeleine, elder daughter of Mr and Mrs Stewart Hamilton, of Hollow Meadows, Sheffield.

Birthdays

The Rev Professor George Anderson, theologian, 83; Sir Tom Arnold MP, 49; Mr Raymond Baxter, broadcaster and writer, 74; Viscount Blakenham, chairman and chief executive, Pearson plc, 58; The Most Rev Dermot Clifford, Roman Catholic Archbishop of Cashel and Emly, 57; Vice-Admiral Sir David Clutterbuck, 83; Sir Paul Girolami, former chairman, Glaxo Holdings, 70; Mr Brian Hayes, Deputy Commissioner, Metropolitan Police, 56; Lord Iliffe, former vice-chairman, Birmingham Post and Mail, 88; Professor Geoffrey Lloyd, Master, Darwin College, Cambridge, 63; Sir James Mellon, former diplomat, 67; Sir David Nicholas, former chairman and chief executive, ITN, 66; Lord Nicholls of Birkenhead, a Lord of Appeal in Ordinary, 63; Mr William O'Brien MP, 67; Air Commodore April Reed, former director, RAF Nursing Services, 66; The Right Rev Anthony Russell, Area Bishop of Dorchester, 53; Mr David Shattock, Chief Constable, Avon and Somerset, 60; Miss Angela Thorne, actress, 57; Professor Edward Ullendorff, philologist of Semitic languages, 76; Admiral Sir Peter White, former Chief of Fleet Support, 77.

Anniversaries

Births: St Edmund Campion, Jesuit martyr, 1540; Robert Boyle, physicist and chemist, 1627; Pompeo Girolamo Batoni, painter, 1708; Robert Burns, poet, 1759; Daniel Maclise, painter, 1806; John Arbuthnot Fisher, first Baron Fisher, admiral, 1841; William Somerset Maugham, author, 1874; Adeline Virginia Woolf, author, 1882; Wilhelm Furtwängler, conductor, 1886; Dame Gwen Ffrangcon-Davies, actress, 1891. **Deaths:** Lucas Cranach the Younger, painter, 1586; Dorothy Wordsworth, writer, 1855; Frederick Leighton, first Baron Leighton, painter and sculptor, 1896; Ouida (Maria Louise de la Ramée), author, 1908; Al (Alphonse) Capone, gangster, 1947; Robertson Hare, actor, 1979; Ava Lavinia Gardner, actress, 1990. **On this day:** Henry VIII married Anne Boleyn, 1533; William Henry Fox Talbot published a description of his invention, the photographic negative, 1839; Maj-Gen Idi Amin deposed Milton Obote, president of Uganda, 1971; the Labour MPs David Owen, William Rodgers and former MPs Mrs Shirley Williams and Roy Jenkins announced they would set up a Council for Social Democracy, 1981. **Today** is Burns Night and the Feast Day of the Conversion of St Paul, St Apollo, St Artemas, St Dwynwen, Saints Juventinus and Maximinus, St Poppo, St Praejectus or Prix and St Publius.

Lectures

National Gallery: Virginia Button, "The National Gallery during World War Two (iv): 'A warlike state cannot create . . .?', British War Art 1939-45", 1pm.

University College London, London WC1: Professor Judith Masson, "Representation of Children: current legal problems 1995-96", 5.15pm.

Dinners

Coningsby Club

Mr Jeremy Hunt, Chairman, and the committee of the Coningsby Club, hosted a dinner last night at the Carlton Club, London SW1. Mr Max Hastings, Editor, *Evening Standard*, was the guest of honour and speaker. Mr Peter Brooke MP presided.

Worshipful Company of Barbers

Professor Henry Roseveare, Professor of History at King's College London, gave the 19th Sir Lionel Denny Lecture at the Museum of London, London EC2, sponsored by the Worshipful Company of Barbers. His subject was "Politics and Profit in the 18th-century Port of London". Professor Donald Bartrop, Master of the Company, presided at a supper held afterwards in Barber-Surgeons' Hall, London EC2.

ROYAL ENGAGEMENTS

The Princess Royal, President, British Olympic Association, attends the Midlands Division Dinner for the British Olympic Appeal at the Sports and Social Complex of Vauxhall Motors, Luton, Bedfordshire. **The Duke of Gloucester,** Patron, Worshipful Company of Pattenmakers, attends the Annual Banquet at the Mansion House, London EC2. **The Duchess of Gloucester** attends a reception given by the British College of Optometrists, to mark the granting of a Royal Charter of Incorporation in the Old Library, Goldsmiths' Hall, London EC2.

Changing of the Guard

The Household Cavalry Mounted Regiment mounts the Queen's Life Guard at Horse Guards, 11am.

Court will order supermarket to keep open

LAW REPORT

25 January 1996

Co-operative Insurance Society Ltd v Argyll Stores (Holdings) Ltd; Court of Appeal (Lord Justice Leggatt, Lord Justice Roch and Lord Justice Millett); 21 December 1995

The court would enforce a covenant in a lease to "keep open" retail premises where damages were an inadequate remedy for breach of the covenant.

The Court of Appeal (Lord Justice Millett dissenting) allowed an appeal by the plaintiff, Co-operative Insurance, from Judge Maddocks QC's refusal to order specific performance against the defendant, Argyll Stores, requiring it to keep open one of its supermarkets for the remainder term of its lease.

The plaintiff let the key area of a shopping centre to Argyll for use as a Safeway supermarket for a term of 35 years from 1979. The lease contained a covenant requiring the tenant to "keep the demised premises open for retail trade during the usual hours of business . . ." It traded until May 1995 when Argyll decided to sell it as it made a loss. The plaintiff was anxious about the effect of the closure on the whole centre and requested that the supermarket be kept open at a concessionary rent until an assignee for the lease was found. Argyll did not respond and instead stripped out the shop. It would cost £1m to reinstate.

The plaintiff applied for judgment against Argyll. The judge, referring to the general practice that damages rather than specific performance was the appropriate remedy for any breach of a keep open covenant, concluded that damages were the appropriate remedy.

Peter W Smith QC and Paul Chaisty (BKJ Lewis) for the plaintiff; Jonathan Gaunt QC and Martin Seaward (T.H.B. Bamford & Co, Hayes) for Argyll.

Lord Justice Leggatt said that the so-called rule that contracts involving the continuous performance of services would not be specifically enforced was plainly not absolute and without exception. Even if Argyll might have been advised when it entered into the lease that if it found it unprofitable it could disregard its promise to keep the shop open on payment of damages, it should have been advised also that the making of an order was discretionary and an order to keep open might be made if the court considered that to be the appropriate remedy.

This was a proper case in which to grant specific performance. It would do the court no credit if in those circumstances the court refrained from granting an injunction on the ground that it had become the practice not to do so. The result would be that the common form of words of the covenant would hardly ever, if ever, be construed as meaning what they said. If the parties wanted to contract that a failure to keep open would sound only in damages, they were at liberty to do so.

The plaintiff would have very considerable difficulty in trying to prove its loss. An award of damages would be unlikely to compensate it fully; and the losses of the other tenants of the shopping centre would be irrecoverable. Argyll had acted with unmitigated commercial cynicism, preferring to resist a claim for damages rather than keep an unambiguous promise. The order of specific performance should be granted.

Lord Justice Roch, concurring, said that the basic issue was whether damages were an adequate remedy. It was not helpful to ask whether a covenant in a lease sounded only in damages. Nor was it consistent with respect for the law to say that a clear undertaking freely entered into could be disregarded when that suited the covenantor on the payment of money.

Damages were not an adequate remedy. Specific performance would require Argyll to operate a supermarket at the premises until 2014 or when an asssignee was obtained. The obligation to carry on business was defined with sufficient certainty. Argyll had acted wantonly and unreasonably.

Lord Justice Millett, dissenting, said that the existence of the court's practice to decline to require a defendant to reopen a business was beyond dispute. To compel a defendant for an indefinite period to carry on a business which he considered was not viable was oppressive. An award of damages reflected normal commercial expectations. Consistent practice made the law. The equitable jurisdiction should not be exercised to defeat the commercial expectations of the parties at the time when they entered into their contractual obligations.

Ying Hui Tan, Barrister

The Harman affair tested to the limit John Prescott's commitment to his leader. But will he always fall in line? **David Aaronovitch** reports

The trials of the loyal servant

For a brief period it seemed the Blair revolution had stumbled. As Tony Blair battled to hold his head above the tide of Tory scorn in the House of Commons on Tuesday, the danger was epitomised by the demeanour of the man next to him. John Prescott was not happy. He scowled, his arms folded tightly across his chest, when John Major was taunting Mr Blair. But worse still he scowled when his leader responded, trying to rally the troops. Here was a man who, for all his dislike of his political enemies, seemed deeply disenchanted with his friends. Had he decided that afternoon to give his leader an ultimatum – either Harriet goes or I do – the uneasy relationship between Mr Blair and his deputy would have collapsed. But that is not all: Mr Blair's relationship with his party would have collapsed too.

Bur Mr Prescott didn't issue his ultimatum. Yesterday he helped to save both Ms Harman's and Mr Blair's bacon. He and his lieutenants let everyone know it was time for the row to stop. But given his obvious unhappiness why did he act to stem the rebellion? And, more importantly, can Mr Blair rely upon his volatile deputy in the bruising times ahead: is there no limit to his loyalty?

In some ways it is extraordinary that their partnership has lasted at all. They are very different. Prescott is exuberant and ostentatious: he likes his Jaguar and his taste for Caribbean holidays was recently exposed when he got caught on one hit by a hurricane. Blair is more uptight, ascetic, avowedly of the professional classes and less open about enjoying himself.

More important, the two men have different relationships with the party. In 1966 when former Cunard steward and trade union firebrand John Prescott was standing for Labour in Tory Southport, the 12-year-old Blair was soliciting votes as the Conservative candidate in his private school's mock election. Prescott is attuned to the older melodies of the Labour Party. His boss is the opposite, accused by left-wing critics like MEP Ken Coates of not having "the faintest idea of how socialists think, or understanding of the mentality of the party that he leads".

Blair appeals to the burgeoning middle classes because he comes from outside the culture of Old Labour. He travels unencumbered by sentimental attachments to the ancient verities of "The Movement". But the journey that is emotionally and intellectually easy for him is deeply troubling for many in his party. It was the distress of this transition that was apparent on Mr Prescott's face two days ago.

Yet the Harman affair was only the latest (if the most serious) of a series of clashes since their election in the summer of 1994.

One of the few perks of a deputy's role is to be confided in, consulted about the key decisions. But on some key occasions in the past 18 months Mr Prescott has found himself well outside it. There was the strategy summit meeting held by Blair and key advisers last spring in the New Forest, to which Mr Prescott was not invited. Nor was the member for Hull best pleased by the leaking of an important memo from PR man, Philip Gould, which warned that Labour wasn't fit to govern. Prescott had never seen it. Incredibly this mistake was repeated over the Harman business. The deputy leader first learned about it from this newspaper. "It was our cock-up", a Blair man told me, "we each thought that the other had told him".

The more important differences have been over policy. Prescott was initially opposed to changing Clause Four, arguing in private that it was a diversion. He is known to have disagreed with Gordon Brown's emphasis on low inflation combined with no tax increases. Last year's Conference decision to further cut the union block vote left him fuming.

Yet Prescott has a seemingly limitless capacity for loyalty. Each time he has swallowed his disappointment and got on with the business of selling the new line to the party and the country. On Clause Four, once Blair made it clear that he was intent on change, Prescott threw himself into helping his leader write the new clause, contributing some important sections himself. "He has the argument in private. But when the decision has been taken John fights for it", says one of his supporters.

> The journey that is emotionally easy for Blair is deeply troubling for many in his party

The main reason for this discipline is obvious. Like most Labour MPs Prescott is desperate to win the next election and understands that Blair is fundamental to victory. He yearns for a Heseltine-type Deputy Prime Minister's role, chairing committees on the economic regeneration of the country. So far Blair has not promised his deputy anything. "He's keeping him keen", one Labour insider believes. "Once its all in the bag, John may not be so pliable".

Others also believe that Prescott is intrigued by Blair, and that part of him rather likes ripping up the past and starting again. They point to Prescott's championing (when shadow Transport Secretary) of the use of private finance to supplement public investment. "John is convinced that the Tories stole the Private Financing Initiative from him", says a Brown aide.

Prescott knows that Blair has a lot invested in him. A precedent for how vital Prescott could be comes from Mrs Thatcher's days. In 1981, beset by recession, she relied upon deputy Prime Minister William Whitelaw to make Thatcherism palatable to a largely hostile party. He did sterling service to a revolution that he did not believe in. "Everybody needs a Willie," said Thatcher afterwards. Prescott plays that role for Blair.

But does Labour's deputy leader have a bottom line? Could Tony Blair go a modernisation too far? The jury is out on that one. According to one MP the underlying concern this week was that Harriet Harman's decision to send her son to a grammar school presaged a return to selection. That would have been more than Prescott (like 80 per cent of his age group, an 11-plus reject) could stomach.

But what about electoral reform, pacts with the Liberals, major changes to the structure of welfare provision – could Labour's Conscience live with those? History suggests he could. This week he wobbled but eventually came round, reminding his colleagues to fight the real enemy at the forthcoming Hemsworth and Staffordshire by-elections. Provided he's kept informed, allowed to argue his case and Labour is ahead in the polls Mr Prescott will probably stay onside.

An Anti-Blair Alliance?

Opposition to Tony Blair within the Parliamentary Labour Party is weak and divided. It comes from disparate sources and is fuelled by widely differing disagreements with Blair's approach. However, as John Major has found, politics has become so fluid that temporary alliances between unlikely comrades can inflict a lot of damage upon a leader. For the first time this week, we had a glimpse of a possible anti-metropolitan, anti-moderniser alliance within the party. This is a guide to how it might be made up.

Research: Tiffanie Darke and Ben Summers

HARD LEFT

MAIN MEMBERS:
Tony Benn, Ken Livingstone, Brian Sedgemore, Jeremy Corbyn, Alan Simpson, Dennis Skinner, Diane Abbott, Ronnie Campbell
BACKGROUND
The usual suspects: long-standing left-wing members of the Campaign Group.
BELIEFS
Pro-Clause IV; increased taxation and public expenditure: universal benefits
TROUBLE-MAKING RATING: Will oppose Blair on most issues but unlikely to vote with Tories. Invariably impotent, but could be influential if a Blair government has a narrow majority.

SOFT LEFT

MAIN MEMBERS:
Peter Hain, Roger Berry, Angela Eagle, Richard Burden
BACKGROUND
Mainly younger MPs who believe "modernisation" is code for "right-wing".
BELIEFS
Mixed bag. Some libertarian socialists sceptical of Blair's conservative policies on family. Critical of centralisation of power in leader's office. Believe Labour will only carry conviction by being radical.
TROUBLE-MAKING CAPACITY
Can cause short-term damage by attacking leadership. Younger members likely to be attracted by prospect of ministerial jobs.

OLD RIGHT

MAIN MEMBERS:
Gerald Kaufman, Roy Hattersley, Gerry Steinburg, Gwyneth Dunwoody, Denzil Davies, Austin Mitchell, John Spellar
BACKGROUND
Long-standing MPs drawn into politics just after the Second World War, wedded to Labour's traditional policies on welfare state and economy.
BELIEFS
Often anti-European; egalitarian on education; belief in Keynesian interventionism to reflate economy; still hold to goal of full employment.
TROUBLE-MAKING RATING
Feel disgruntled with young modernisers, but unlikely to oppose Blair publicly.

ANTI-METROPOLITANS

MAIN MEMBERS:
Dennis Canavan, Don Dixon, Peter Snape Richard Caborn
BACKGROUND
MPs who distrust Blair because they strongly identify with their constituencies.
BELIEFS
Proudly anti-trendy. Fear over-intellectualisation of the party. Oppose politically correct all-women short lists.
TROUBLE-MAKING CAPACITY
Disquiet with Blair leadership more about culture than policy – little for opposition to form around.

SINGLE ISSUE IDEALISTS

MAIN MEMBERS:
Frank Field (welfare)
Clive Soley (housing)
Kevin McNamara (Northern Ireland)
Calum Macdonald (Lib-Lab pacts)
Tony Wright (pro-proportional representation)
Tam Dalyell (anti-devolution)
BACKGROUND
Often maverick MPs with policy expertise combined with moral interest in a single issue.
BELIEFS
Vary according to issue.
TROUBLE-MAKING CAPACITY
Numerically insignificant but can embarrass leadership.

DIARY

Mandelson gets in a spin

The other day I asked the BBC if John Birt's strictures to the Labour Party to stop trying to spin doctor them into submission had had any effect. "Oh, most definitely," my most senior source told me, "they never try to bully us any more. We've put them in their place."

The next day I sauntered off to Westminster, glowing with pride in the impartiality of our national broadcasting corporation. And what did I spy?

Earbashing: Mandelson

The BBC's Westminster correspondent, Huw Edwards, being shouted at and, I shudder to say, sworn at by a man who I took to be a violently disgruntled licence fee payer. I averted my eyes.

But the row continued for some time. Wearily I looked a little harder at Edwards's assailant. Imagine my consternation when I discerned him to be Peter Mandelson MP, father of spin doctoring and active servant of the Blair cause!

Worse still was the cause of his ire – he was berating Mr Edwards over the BBC's coverage of the Harriet Harman affair.

Red faces among blues

In case you thought the Tories were having an easy time of it, what with Labour in turmoil over the Harriet Harman brouhaha, I bring tidings of a possible embarrassment to the true blue camp. In December (since when they have kept it very quiet) John Evans, 43, the Tories' prospective parliamentary candidate for Sherwood, was arrested for allegedly stealing a man's coat from a branch of Marks & Spencer in Guildford, Surrey.

However, Evans, a former leader of Hastings Council, was not charged. A police spokesman said: "He has been bailed to return on February 6 when a decision will be made as to whether he is charged."

If he were to be charged, his political position would be in dire straits. But for the moment, Tory Central Office says stoutly: "We don't talk about 'ifs'."

Gym life, but not as we ...

Following my recent exclusive about the new friendship between the Princess of Wales and Madonna I have fresh news which may cause the two to bond even further.

Fantasy land: Tiggy

Madonna is a fan of the Princess's favourite gym, the Harbour Club. Unlike the Princess, however, Madonna does not believe in sharing the premises with either Joe Public, England rugby captains or property developers. Last year, therefore, she rang the club and asked if it would close during her stay in London, so that she and her friends could use it exclusively.

"It will be worth your while," she told the management, "My name will give you great publicity." Unsurprisingly, the Harbour Club refused.

But imagine if (after she has perused this column) the Princess is game-on to share in Madonna's plan – perhaps the club will change its mind. The sight of the pair of them arriving together in their Lycra shorts? What more could the paparazzi want? Perhaps a shot of Lycra-shorted Tiggy Legge-Bourke, nanny to the young princes, and reportedly Diana's *bête noir*, arriving arm in arm with the Princess ... but now I'm falling off into fantasy land.

Branson: 'Why I lose'

What does a tycoon do when he is stranded in Morocco, waiting for the weather to improve so he can mount his balloon? Richard Branson has taken up Travel Scrabble – very badly. Anxious, however, not to lose face with his opponents, a succession of Fleet Street's finest, he declared earnestly the other day: "It's not my game. I was brought up on Monopoly and Risk." That, agreed the hacks, explains a lot ...

Howard's way in Ambridge

To the City Livery Club, to celebrate 45 years of fictional rural dwelling on Radio 4 – namely *The Archers*. There I encountered one of the programme's biggest fans, the Home Secretary, Michael Howard.

He jovially told me that he "skims the Sunday papers in order to settle down to the omnibus edition and coffee" (Sunday newspaper editors, please take note).

However, recent listening has caused Mr Howard a certain amount of alarm – he is most concerned by the budding romance between Shula Archer and the abrasive Simon Pemberton. Unable to keep his fears (and perhaps his sense of reality) to himself, on Tuesday night he strode over to the actress Sara Coward (alias Caroline Pemberton). "Congratulations on your marriage to Guy Pemberton." he told her earnestly, adding, "but I think you have to do something about your new stepson, fast."

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TELEPHONE 0171-293 2000/0171-345 2000 FAX 0171-293 2435/0171-345 2435

EDITOR: Charles Wilson

ASSISTANT EDITOR: Charles Leadbeater MANAGING EDITOR: Colin Hughes
SECTION TWO EDITOR: Simon Kelner · SATURDAY EDITOR: David Robson
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Better late than never for EMU

Plans for a single European currency are in serious trouble. Its supporters should ease up or risk the project blowing up in their face.

Even the great Europhiles of the Continent are starting to worry. On Tuesday, Jacques Delors, the former president of the European Commission, admitted he doubted the timetable for European Monetary Union could be met. Yesterday, the former French President Valéry Giscard d'Estaing called for a relaxation of the economic criteria that countries have to meet before the currency can be created. Spain's Foreign Minister, Carlos Westendorp (known at home as "Mister Europe"), called for the deadline of 1999 to be put back, saying that the project was sinking into a "credibility crisis".

In response, Jacques Santer, the European Commission President, yesterday speaking at the end of an ill-timed show designed to market the "Euro", rejected a delay.

The trouble for Mr Santer is that the growing doubts about the EMU timetable are unlikely to fade. That is because the Maastricht treaty on monetary union did not anticipate the sharp slowdown in the European economy in the past six months. Only countries that meet strict economic criteria can join the common currency. Most countries already have lower inflation than Maastricht demands. But on another key condition even Germany is not doing too well, with a budget deficit above the 3 per cent of national income that the treaty allows. In France, the prognosis is much gloomier. Slow growth means tax revenues are lower than expected, while public spending remains high to cope with unemployment. German and French efforts to reduce their budget deficits by cutting spending or raising taxes risk slowing their economies even further, making the problem worse.

The political costs of forcing France into the Maastricht strait-jacket are even more severe, witness the strikes that crippled much of the country late last year and exposed the frailty of the French ruling élite.

All of this will be music to the ears of British Euro-sceptics. But they would be foolish to start celebrating the demise of the Euro prematurely. With an effort, Germany will probably be able to meet the Maastricht criteria by 1999. The fact that countries should not unite their currencies yet under the current Maastricht criteria doesn't mean they shouldn't unite at all. The German mark will still dominate European currency markets regardless of whether there is EMU. In many respects we have already lost a lot of discretion over monetary policy to the Bundesbank. At least a European central bank would set interest rates, taking account of the needs of all EU states, rather than giving Germany priority. The case for a single currency remains strong. But the case for delaying its introduction, perhaps till 2001, has got stronger.

There is an alternative. Delay might be interpreted by the public and the markets as a loss of purpose and direction. Another way out would be to stick with 1999 but relax the Maastricht criteria. Instead of the 3 per cent ceiling on the budget deficit, a broader definition could allow countries with sound economies to borrow more in times of recession. Mr Santer has said he might consider this. The Germans wouldn't be happy, of course, strict economic criteria are essential to persuade the Bundesbank and the German public to give up their precious mark.

But something, somewhere is going to have to give. Monetary union without the French is inconceivable. Yet for France and others to join under the current criteria risks associating EMU with deflation and recession. Political and economic pain could make the Euro untenable, irrevocably damaging the whole European project. Europe needs to heed its elder statesmen and ease up on EMU.

Sad tale of a modern-day Juliet

Sarah Cook makes an unlikely romantic heroine. The dumpy girl from Braintree, in Essex, fell in love with her Turkish Romeo after sharing a bottle of pop on a beach. At first sight, she seems to share very little with the most famous tragic heroine our culture has produced: Shakespeare's Juliet. Apart from one thing, that is: 13-year-old Sarah Cook got married at the age that Juliet gave her life to Romeo.

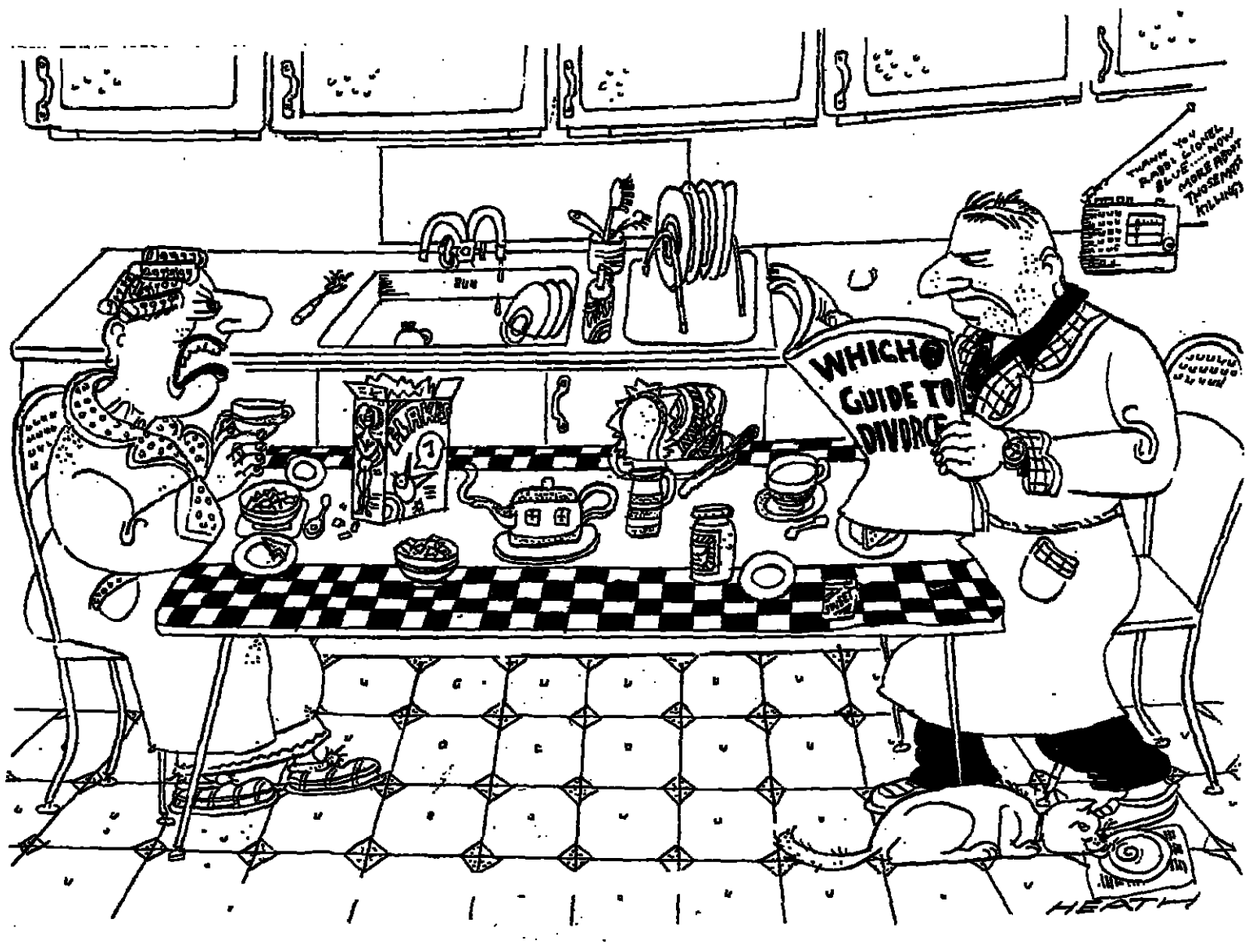
Shakespeare would not have shared our bemusement with Sarah Cook's marriage to Musa Komeagae, a waiter. Britain has been outraged, a sure sign that it is also confused. What were her parents doing, smiling at the wedding? Why did they let her do it? The girl must be very sad, disturbed or misguided, we are told, she needs saving from herself. A society hyper-alert to the dangers of child abuse is put on guard to protect Sarah Cook from the exploitation that threatens her.

We are in serious danger of over-reacting. Attitudes towards the acceptable age at which we should marry are largely determined by culture. As people marry later, partly because of longer life expectancy and extended years of fertility, it becomes more incomprehensible that anyone could wish to tie the knot in their teens, let alone before the age of 16. We turn a blind eye to young people having sex at an early age, but we find the idea of them marrying young unacceptable because we do not think they are emotionally ready for such a commitment.

Yet some children today mature, both physically and emotionally, much earlier than their counterparts a couple of generations ago. And many young people are more strident in making their wishes known and more confident in acting upon them. These developments are unpalatable for those who wish to preserve children in the image of their own youth.

It is true that Juliet's father revealed hopes that strike a modern chord. He wished to "let two more summers wither in their pride, ere we may think her ripe to be a bride". But his daughter's youth was not the major obstacle to her alliance with Romeo. Likewise, it seems Sarah Cook's marriage in Turkey, although illegal there just as it would be here, is far less frowned upon than it would be if it had taken place in Essex. Young marriages are traditional in rural areas of Turkey, although the earliest allowed is at 14 years and then only with special permission.

All this suggests Sarah Cook's case should be treated with more sensitivity. She needs protection in case everything goes dreadfully wrong and she has to flee home. But it would be a mistake for her husband to be tried for rape given that all parties, including the two families, consented to the marriage. Equally, talk of placing Sarah in a children's home is heavy-handed and legalistic. Whatever the imperfections of her life in Turkey, council care is no solution. Indeed, it may be the worst possible place for her.



'Must you always read at the breakfast table?'

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Labour politicians' comprehensive history of selection

From Mr Ronnie Landau
Sir: Does no one remember that the former leader of the Labour Party (shortly afterwards to be Prime Minister) Harold Wilson, trailblazing pioneer of comprehensive education and head of a party still wedded uncompromisingly to ideological "old" socialism, openly sent his two sons to one of north-west London's leading independent day schools (yes, fee-paying – he even shunned the local grammar schools)?

I do not remember Wilson, or other socialists who did likewise, being roundly condemned by his party, by the media or by holier-than-thou Tory opportunists. On the contrary, it was recognised then – as I believe it should be now – that, while unity of theory and practice may be generally desirable, not every personal decision taken (even by a politician) is necessarily a political one. There are some actions one takes as a parent that can be described as being of a purely "parental" nature.

What has changed in the intervening three decades is the cancerous growth of an increasingly amoral, obsessive and vindictive press – tabloid and broadsheet – which, in its hunger for "celebrity" blood, resembles nothing so closely as it does a lynch mob.

Yours faithfully,
R. S. LANDAU
London, N12
23 January

From Mr T. H. Hockton
Sir: Voters may not indeed share the faith of unreconstructed "old Labour" or "old Lib Dem" activists (leading article, 22 January). Not all of these have been responsible for their own children. Some are lucky where they live. Others are like the sectarians whose faith bans radical treatment for their children.

In 16 years, Tory governments have done little to reduce the gap between private and general education. It is naive to argue that, if all educated and articulate people send their own children to the nearest local school, it can improve quickly enough to benefit them.

After 35 years of secondary school teaching, I retired as head of a comprehensive school, then taking 360 boys and girls each year. As a young man, I fought two parliamentary elections as a Labour Party candidate. We argued for comprehensive schools, hoping to improve everyone's chances. We were short of practical experience and appreciation of the human and material resources needed.

It was disappointing but we should not despair. With our support, realists such as Tony Blair and Paddy Ashdown can make progress — providing they are not too hampered by the complexes of their old-fashioned evangelicals.

Yours faithfully,
TOM HOCKTON
Hove, East Sussex

From Mr John Charman
Sir: Perhaps Labour MPs and other activists could take time off from criticising Harriet Harman and explain to me why, if selection is wrong for schools, is it all right for universities?

I suspect the answer is that the Labour party accepts that a selection policy for universities is a sensible one, both for the people that are selected and for the country, because to do otherwise would result in a dilution of academic quality and a general lowering of standards. In not applying the same criteria to schools, could it be that the Labour Party policy for schools is driven by "Old Labour" dogma rather than what is best for the country?

Like it or not, selection and choice are involved all through life and, in trying to pretend otherwise by abolishing selection for secondary education, the Labour Party does the brightest 5 per cent of our children, and the country as a whole, a grave disservice.

Yours sincerely,
JOHN CHARMAN
London, SW1
23 January

From Mr Peter Bradbury
Sir: I do wish Labour MPs, indeed all MPs, could come to accept that education is more than O and A levels and the complex of academic excellence that underpins them, vital as that is for the life of any school.

Perhaps of equal importance in our socially divided society is the effect that a comprehensive education can have on children from the professional and middle classes, the acquired ability to mix easily with children from all classes and, incidentally, of both sexes, to understand different values and motivations.

A third aspect is the contribution which such parents can make to the life of the comprehensive school by taking part in the official and unofficial channels which exist to improve standards and maintain the morale of hard-pressed teachers and governors.

Perhaps it is too early to speak of a *trahison des clercs*, but my mind is certainly running in that direction.

Sincerely,
PETER BRADBURY
East Bergholt, Essex
22 January

The writer was a divisional education officer in the Inner London Education Authority, 1970-81

From Mr David Robinson
Sir: Harriet Harman had the choice of a variety of schools for her son. I must take issue with the perception that the school with 1 per cent of pupils obtaining five good GCSEs is a failing school and that the grammar school with a 99 per cent pass rate is a successful one. Until we are able sensibly to measure value added, the reality will not be evident.

Yours sincerely,
DAVID ROBINSON
Totnes, Devon

Stakeholder precedents

From Dr Michael de Podesta
Sir: I have been surprised that, in the debate on the concrete meaning of the term "stakeholder", little attention has been drawn to the relevance of developments in the ownership of building societies. The mutual structure of building societies made stakeholders of both staff and customers, investors and borrowers. At the instant at which the societies are privatised, this stakeholding is preserved since the institution is still owned by its staff and customers. However, as share ownership by customers becomes diluted over the years, it becomes in the interests of ex-members wearing a shareholding hat to seek higher returns on their "investment".

Building societies are (or were) examples of how stakeholding could exist in a real complex world. However, the destruction of mutuality by get-rich-quick merchants at the head of the societies shows how delicate mutual structures are, and how they must be protected by law. Share ownership – unless restricted to customers and staff – is not stakeholding; it's just plain old capitalism.

Sincerely,
MICHAEL DE PODESTA
Birkbeck College
University of London
London, WC1
22 January

From Mr Larry McLean
Sir: The "stakeholder society" is what we Liberal Democrats have been advocating for at least 60 years. Remember the *Yellow Book* of the 1920s, calling for all employees (and I stress all) to have a stake in the business they work for?

Papal encyclicals support this policy, especially *Pacem in Terris*, *Quadragesimo Anno* and *Gaudem et Spes*. The new catechism of the Catholic Church supports the concept of profit-sharing and co-operation between owners and workers.

I write as an investor in industrial equity shares, but I would willingly forgo some of my dividends if it would bring peace and stability in our industries.

Yours sincerely,
LARRY MCLEAN
Wolverhampton
19 January

Notes about airport food

From Mr Egon Ronay
Sir: In the context of my having condemned three foreign airports in comparison with Heathrow, Simon Calder (Travel column, 20 January), mentioned that I have been working for four years for BAA on improving the standard of food (in 130 catering outlets).

My integrity has never been doubted and, on my comparative visits to Schiphol, De Gaulle, Frankfurt and Heathrow airports, a member of my special airports inspection team and an independent representative of the Press Association both took detailed notes of every tasting of some 200 food items.

The Press Association's man completely concurred with our findings. Our separate notes are available for examination and they would put Mr Calder's mind at rest.

Yours faithfully
EGON RONAY
London, SW3
23 January

No poverty of ideas here, Delia

From Ms Betty Cairns
Sir: If Delia Smith follows Louise Levene's advice (17 January) and produces a basic cookery book for people with little knowledge or cash, she will be in very illustrious "cooking" company indeed.

Both Fracatelli, Queen Victoria's chef, and the great Alexis Soyer of the Reform Club produced just such cookery books, giving advice on utensils and cheap nourishing dishes. The emphasis was very much on soups and various "puddings" to eat with meat and fish, and the recipes were geared to large poor Victorian families. Soyer's *Shilling Cookery Book for the Artisan* sold 264,000 copies in 13 years, a vast sale for those days. Soyer also produced a *Charitable Cookery* book for use by those running soup kitchens, several of which Soyer funded himself.

Possibly our current cookery icons may care to consider Soyer's comment, in his *6p Cookery Regenerator* (all profits to the Irish famine fund)

> it requires more science to produce a good dish at a trifling expense than a superior one with unlimited means.

Yours sincerely,
BETTY CAIRNS
London, N22

EU decision on Euro campaign

From Mr Geoffrey Martin
Sir: It is not the case that the British government has blocked the European Commission from extending a single currency campaign to this country ("Britain bars publicity campaign for 'Euro'", 23 January).

I and my colleagues have stated publicly that an advertising or propaganda campaign would be counter-productive, not least because the British Parliament has still to decide whether the UK will join the single currency. However, if people or organisations wish to find out more about the issue, whether here or in other member states, it is only right they should be able to do that and we will provide them with the necessary facts.

This is a position with which the President of the Commission entirely concurs. It may be that, for its own purposes, the Government wishes to propagate the view that it took the decision or was somehow able to "block" the Commission, but that is simply not the case.

Yours faithfully,
GEOFFREY MARTIN
Head of Representation
in the United Kingdom
The European Commission
London, SW1

Biblical hypocrisy

From Dr James Carleton Paget
Sir: In her present plight, it may comfort Harriet Harman to know that no less a man than St Paul accused St Peter of hypocrisy (Galatians 2.13 and 14). The latter survived the aspersions of the former and became, according to Christian tradition at least, the first Christian Pope.

Yours sincerely,
JAMES CARLETON PAGET
Peterhouse
Cambridge

Below the salt

From Mr David Glover
Sir: Once again we read of yet another totally wrong-headed Tory policy. I refer, of course, to John Major's views on putting the salt on chips after the vinegar ("Is the party over for Maggie's kids?", 17 January). The application of condiments in this way would cause the salt to stick in the vinegar on the top layer of chips only.

Anyone even slightly to the left-of-centre would apply the vinegar last, thus allowing it to wash the salt through to the underlying layers of chips, resulting in a more equal distribution.

It would seem that even Tory policy regarding chips is designed to benefit the few at the expense of the many.

Yours faithfully,
DAVID GLOVER
Leicester

Oedipal rage

From Mr George MacDonald Ross
Sir: The earliest recorded example of road rage ("Half all drivers are targets of road rage", 24 January) was surely when Oedipus killed his father in an argument over who had priority to drive his chariot over a narrow bridge. Perhaps ancient Greek priorities signs were as confusing as ours?

Yours faithfully,
GEORGE MACDONALD ROSS
Leeds
24 January

Post letters to Letters to the Editor, and include a daytime telephone number. (Fax: 0171-293 2056; e-mail: letters@independent.co.uk) Letters may be edited for length and clarity.

It's opera, boyo – rugby with music

MILES KINGTON

The other day I suggested it did not really matter whether the Welsh built a new opera house or a rugby stadium, as there was not much difference between rugby and opera, especially the way the Welsh play both. I am saddened to say that people have written in from as far as Wales to protest, and I have even been pilloried in the *Welsh Local Government Corruption News*.

Well, gentlemen, I aim to prove you wrong by bringing you an extract from an opera I am working on. It is the first-ever opera written about rugby, and it is called *Tristan und Gareth*. It tells the tragic story of two friends, Tristan and Gareth, who grow up together in the Welsh valleys, attend the same school and aim to play side by side in the Welsh National XV, until cruel Fate intervenes to separate them ...

But you will get a better idea from a dip into the libretto. The first act shows the two boys coming to Cardiff as players in the Welsh Schools XV, which beats the English Schoolboys 15-9 (five penalties to three, no tries). In the second scene, Tristan and Gareth celebrate the victory by going out for the evening in Cardiff. Here they are, outside the Scrum Half's Arms in Pontnewydd Street.

Tristan: Well, Gareth, that was a famous victory and no mistake!
Gareth: Was it? But it only happened this afternoon. How can it be famous already?
Tristan: No, what I meant was ... well, never mind.
Gareth: You were always the clever one with words, Tristan. That's why you won the Dylan Thomas School prize for a rugby essay, on life as a forward.
Tristan: Ah, yes. "Hark! It is dark in the scrum, here in the dumb, boot-lined scrum, where feet rummage in the scrummage for the fall of the ball ..."
Gareth: Yes, yes, thanks very much. I've heard it all before, but there's more to life than culture.
Tristan: Is there? Like what?
Gareth: Like drinking after the match. (He sings.)

When the final whistle blows,
When it's time to end the game,
When you shake hands with your foes,
Then you always do the same –
In the shower and out again,
Neatly dressed and in the bar,
Downing pints of bitter Brain*
To show them what a man you are.
A game of rugby, win or lose,
Will leave you swaying but upright;
Eighty minutes on the booze
Will leave you flat out, tight.
Rugby players may come and go,
You may even change your club,
But there's one thing we all know
After the game, it's down the pub!

**Brain's is an excellent Welsh beer, not much seen in England. – Librettist's note.*

Tristan: You're disgusting, you are. I didn't come into rugby to drink beer and sing songs.
Gareth: Then what did you come into rugby for, boyo? To beat England? To get the Grand Slam? Wake up, Tristan! Rugby is the quick route to oblivion!
Tristan: How do you mean?
Gareth: There are two paths to oblivion in rugby – one is to fail to catch the selectors' eye and the other is to drink yourself silly. I know which I'd choose. (He sings.)

Oh, once we had
A great Welsh side,
And Max Boyce joked
About them with pride.
Yes, poor Max Boyce
Went on and on
About Phil Bennett
And Barry John
But now that both are a memory
And Wales can barely
Beat Italy,
Max Boyce is left without an act.
And that's how Welsh
Comedians get sacked!

(Exit singing. Tristan is about to follow him when he is accosted by a young girl.)

Girl: Tristan! You looking for a good time?
Tristan: Well, I don't know ... How do you mean?
Girl: A trip up north! Three-year contract! Rugby League! Car, house and all the black puddings you can eat!
Tristan: Gosh! It certainly sounds tempting ...

Will he fall for it and lose his virtue? Find out into tomorrow's thrilling episode.

New focus, same crisis

Irish peace looks as elusive as ever, despite yesterday's Mitchell report, argues David McKittrick

Ancient Greek dramas would sometimes culminate in the appearance of a *deus ex machina*, a god lowered on to the stage by means of a crane, who would use supernatural powers to sort out the muddles created by mortals.

On one reading, that was the role played in Belfast yesterday by the former US senator George Mitchell, when he delivered his international body's report on arms decommissioning. For some hours, it seemed the logjam might be easing, until John Major's announcement of plans for a local election sent tensions rising again.

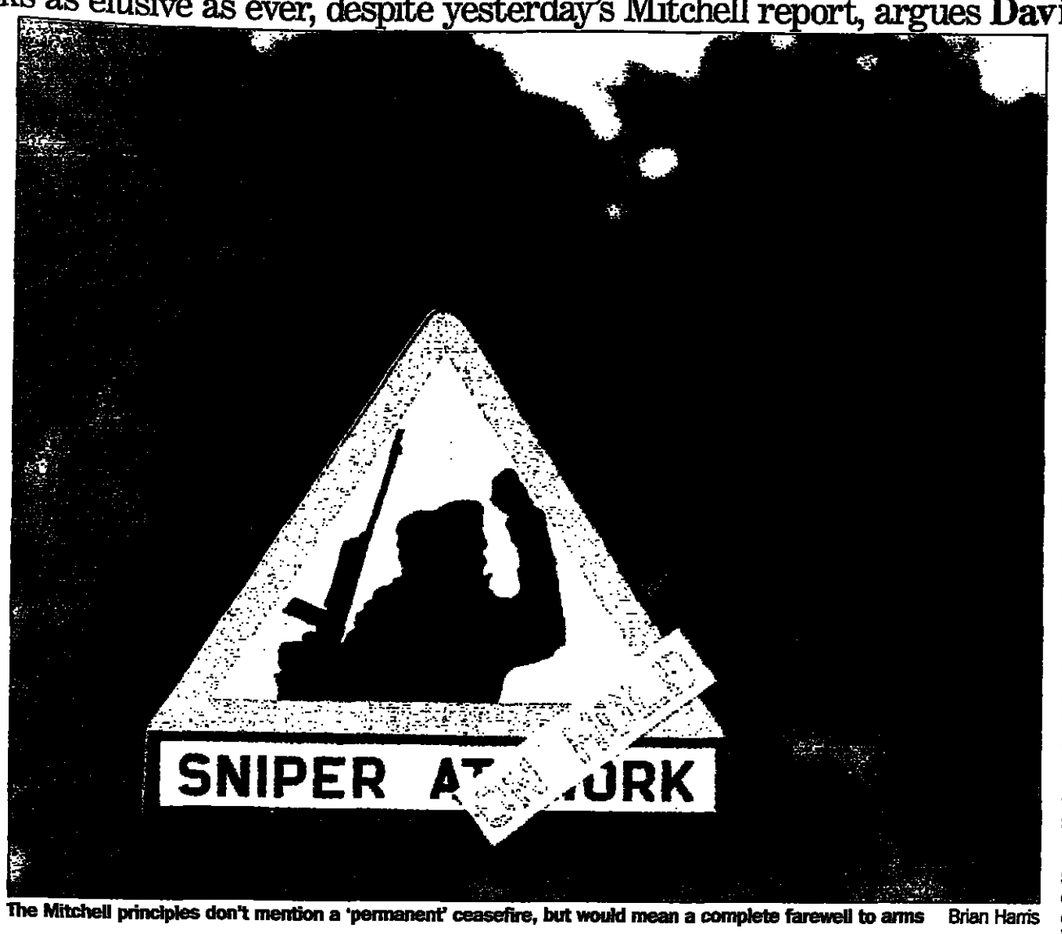
Mr Mitchell is no magicmaker. As he said at the outset of his report, the factors on which a peace process must be based were already known. He did not discover or invent some new element to transform the situation: he simply brought to the problem a measure of American can-do pragmatism.

In that sense, his role was less one of divine intervention than empirical observation, followed by practical suggestions and comment.

He eased the British government off the hook of its long-standing insistence that republicans deliver up arms before being allowed to the table. He did so simply by pointing out that there was no chance of the IRA or the loyalists decommissioning weapons in advance of talks.

The dogs in the streets of Belfast and Dublin already knew that, but the fact of Mr Mitchell saying it has somehow made it more acceptable – or at least tolerable. The same dogs already appreciated the other facts laid out in the Mitchell report, yet somehow he and his two colleagues have clarified many points, made them easier to digest and separated off what is politically possible from what is not.

None of this is accidental, for it is apparent, both from the report itself and from his performance at his news conference, that Mr Mitchell is a class act. With grace and humour, he showed himself to be the most skilful political performer seen in Belfast since – well, since last month, when his friend Bill Clinton was in town.



The Mitchell principles don't mention a 'permanent' ceasefire, but would mean a complete farewell to arms Brian Harris

The British and Irish governments, when they agreed to set up the international body back in November, gave it what seemed a fairly narrow remit, asking for a report on decommissioning. What they got was a report that represents an overview of almost the entire spectrum of the immediate issues.

The international body clearly took as its starting point not the essentially technical issue of decommissioning but the much broader approach of working out how to advance the peace process. It first concluded that no guns were going to be forthcoming in the immediate future, and then moved on to draft a list of democratic principles to which all parties should be required to subscribe.

The IRA, it will be remembered, declared a "complete cessation of military operations" in August 1994 but has always declined to use the word "permanent" in relation to its ceasefire. That word does not appear in the six Mitchell principles, but together these would represent a complete farewell to arms. The deal is that if the IRA insists on not handing over weapons it must instead make a solemn promise to the world that the shadow of the gunman has gone.

Though brief, the report contains mentions of (though not recommendations on) matters such as the prisoners' issue, the use of plastic bullets, the idea of a review of more than 100,000 legally held weapons, and the predominantly Protestant make-up of the RUC. It also mentions "an elective process" – much to the relief of Mr Major, who had been banking on that.

The British government had already done much work on the idea, and Mr Major yesterday spoke of urgently putting legislation through Parliament. The attractions of an election for the Government are obvious, mainly because it will go a fair way to meeting the requirements of the Ulster Unionists.

The Government's enthusiasm arises mainly from the fact that the Ulster Unionist leader, David Trimble, had expressed his opinion that an election would give Sinn Fein a mandate that would allow him to talk to them, even without the decommissioning of weapons.

This opened up the possibility of inter-party talks without an arms hand-over, a route the Government has gratefully taken. Mr Trimble had envisaged an election to a new assembly, but in the Commons yesterday Mr Major seemed to envisage an election of negotiators rather than a plan to set up a devolved institution along parliamentary lines.

This distinction is crucial. Previous assemblies, the longest-lived of which was the Stormont parliament from 1921 until 1972, are still seared into Irish nationalist folk-memory as bastions of Unionist privilege and anti-Catholic discrimination. It is no exaggeration to say that a return to anything reminiscent of this would cause large numbers of republican supporters to contemplate going back to war.

Sinn Fein had a good morning yesterday with the launch of the Mitchell document, but a bad afternoon when John Major lifted the election idea from the obscurity of the report's penultimate page.

But it has now been elevated to the centrepiece of the peace process, where it is destined to remain for some time yet. Even with the promise of Labour support, it will clearly take months for the election idea to be discussed and make its way on to the statute book, and for voters to go to the polls.

This means the abandonment of the present target date for all-party talks to open at the end of next month. Mr Trimble's evident pleasure at the Government's action has also inflamed the suspicion – never far from the surface of the nationalist psyche – that Mr Major's new course was at least partly motivated by the hope of securing Unionist support in the Commons lobbies.

Whatever the truth of this, Sinn Fein find that, 16 months on from the IRA ceasefire, the doors of the conference chamber remain closed to them. The ominous importance of this is that they have elevated the question of all-party talks almost to a point of principle, reassuring their hard men that they would soon get to the table.

Thus a day that began with what looked like a breakthrough ended in something close to crisis, with no easing of the long build-up of frustration within the republican movement. The Mitchell report mentioned the lack of trust in Northern Ireland: the day ended with less trust than ever, and a sense that resolving the election controversy might need the appearance of yet another *deus ex machina*.

Let us delay full talks no longer

ALBERT REYNOLDS

The clearest single message from the report by the international body on decommissioning is that we must banish fear and rebuild trust and confidence. At each stage of the peace process trust has been more important than any particular issue: apparently insoluble problems with words like "permanent" and "clarification" have been solved. The ceasefires themselves – which most people thought unachievable – were achieved because trust had been built.

Senator Mitchell and his colleagues have touched the very heart of the problem when they say that the decommissioning issue is merely a symptom of the absence of trust. My hope is that both governments and all parties will see in the report a clear opportunity to make up the ground that has been lost and to move towards inclusive all-party talks.

I have always held that decommissioning before talks was unacceptable. Perhaps more pertinently, I have always felt it was unobtainable. And it was never agreed or accepted that it would be a precondition for the starting of talks.

That said, the suggestion in the report that some forms of decommissioning could take place by agreement as part of the talks process would be a valuable confidence-building measure, which could prove the bina fides of all parties concerned and speed the process of rebuilding trust. Only with a resumption of dialogue will that happen.

My view on the need for inclusive dialogue has always been direct and uncluttered: while dialogue is taking place there can be no excuse in any quarter for a return to violence or killing; the report endorses this view in the clearest terms.

Looking on in recent months, my single greatest fear has been that the delay, the inactivity and the vacuum created would put an unnecessary strain on an already strained process. We have seen peace being jeopardised; we have seen pragmatism being replaced by dogmatism and the result has been disquieting.

The spectre of violence has begun to creep back in. And such a discouraging trend can only go in one direction if it is not stopped. A return to the table and a resumption of real dialogue is the only way to prevent the ugly possibility of a return to violence and to work out a just and lasting settlement in a totally democratic and exclusively peaceful manner. The commission's report points out everything in that direction and no other.

If any side sees in the recommendations further cause for stalling, sees them as another obstacle, then a serious question must hang over their commitment to finding a solution.

One thing I know in my heart is that people throughout Ireland and Britain want a continuation of the normal life they are now enjoying – normal life which was absent for 25 years. I know that people never want to see a return to killing, maiming and sorrow. And nobody will thank or respect either government – or any party – if they allow surmountable difficulties to threaten peace. Nobody could expect all their views to prevail in this report, and that hasn't happened. All sides must expect to compromise and to leave behind past historical positions in order to create the environment for all-party talks. I believe there is sufficient here for both governments and all sides to go along with. And I would deplore any attempt to substitute one precondition with another, which appears to be the present position of the British government. Of course, an elected assembly can be on the *agenda for debate* at all-party talks.

The steps to peace were enshrined in the Downing Street declaration when we spoke about achieving peace, stability and reconciliation through a process of dialogue and co-operation. We need a return to the trust which brought about that focus and clarity. It is time to start the inclusive dialogue with everything on the table and everybody at the table.

The writer was prime minister of Ireland, 1992-1994.

The furore over Harriet Harman's choice of school for her son has exposed the lack of realism prevalent in Labour's education policy

The legacy of the war of Little Joe

ANDREW MARR

The five worst days in Tony Blair's leadership of the Labour Party ended yesterday with what was, by all accounts, a sparkling speech to his seething parliamentary party. As they spilled out into the Commons corridor, their faces were not happy and their private views about Harriet Harman were unchanged; but almost every lip was buttoned. The War of Little Joe seemed over.

Even if that is so, however, it has ended with a bloody pyrrhic victory for the leadership. The damage has been serious and will reverberate throughout the year. Labour's poll rating will surely slip at an important moment. When the general election comes, my guess is that Labour candidates will lose seats they might otherwise have won because of this.

The gap between old and new Labour has widened. Despite Blair's huge personal authority, he cannot afford many more episodes like this. When he demands self-sacrifice in the cause of victory, there will be resentful mutterings about his own front bench. Joe Harman's education may be free at point of use; but it will cost the Labour Party quite a bit.

Choice in schooling is not like European monetary union, nor the West Lothian question, or most other bits of political arcana. It has chat-power. It is something that everyone can understand and that many people are emotional about.

Some voters will turn against Labour, not because of the charge that the Harman family has been hypocritical, but because the reaction of Labour MPs has chilled them a little. It suggests to some that the old Labour Party, so enthusiastic about stopping people doing things, determined to build a better world on a mound of prohibitions, is back. Certainly, the rage of many Labour MPs about Harman's choice has not been pretty. Too many have made it clear that they think she is a selfish middle-class southern woman of a kind that should be expropriated and preferably extirpated, too. As one senior figure put it: "I wouldn't p*** on her if she was on fire." This is not, to put it mildly, the way to woo Middle Britain.

Other voters, though probably fewer, will turn away from Labour because of the charge that Harman is a hypocrite. I think she is. But I think she is no more of a hypocrite than Andrew Marr – or even, just possibly, the average reader of this column.

Daily life is an endless series of compromises between the world as it is and the world as we would like it to be. For anyone with principles, hypocrisy is a universal sin. We sit snugly in our cars whining about pollution and congestion. We complain about underfunded this or that but do not offer the voluntary extra taxes that smiling Conservatives remind us the Treasury would accept. We prefer not to know too much about the short lives of the animals we eat.

Oh yes, and many of us praise the virtues of comprehensive education while avoiding the nearest comprehensive for our children. If I was living where Harman lives and had a child who got a place at St Olave's, I would jump at the chance. But then, as the picture byline will confirm, I am not Harman. Doesn't the fact of her being a Labour front-bencher change things? Doesn't it make things worse?

She is not enjoying a privilege for her own family that she would take away from other people's if she got into power. St Olave's would almost certainly still exist as a selective grammar school after a decade of Labour government because, despite David Blunkett's "read my lips" denunciation of selection at the party conference, the party has decided to keep selective grammar schools where that is what the local voters want.

Labour's rage at Harman has not been pretty

Harman's hypocrisy certainly is not of that gold-plated, triple-A variety. The problem is rather that Labour MPs maintain that selection is bad for everyone and that comprehensives are good – not just for society, but for all children. And the Harman-Dromeys, like many other parents, clearly do not believe it. There is a gap, in short, between Labour policy and the prejudices of millions of people. The problem for the pro-comprehensive majority in the Labour Party is that it cannot achieve its stated aim. It will not take on the vocal power of the grammar school lobby. And it cannot take on the private schools because Britain subscribes to international obligations setting out the right to choose an independent education.

So enough of the middle classes exclude themselves, paying through private school fees or higher mortgages to ensure that "comprehensives" are really "partials", particularly in the inner cities. Labour is well aware of this but has no plausible answer. Moral exhortation is useless. If Labour MPs will not be exhorted, precious few other people will feel any obligation. Labour hopes that extra spending and a change in ethos will improve the state schools. Which is fine; except that it will not promise extra spending.

The Conservatives gleefully claim it all as a vindication of their school reforms. But the truth is that government policy is equally muddled. For most parents, the "choice" at the core of Tory policy is a big lie. Selection of pupils by schools and the tough squeeze on extra places are destroying what little choice is left in the system.

The Tories have become the defenders of socially divided education without actually having the courage to say so. Conservative MPs claim their intention is to create "excellent" state schools, yet few would dream of sending their children to them.

The disastrous truth which the Harman case should ram home to every thinking voter is that with both big parties proclaiming education to be their priority and the election looming, neither has a plausible or intellectually credible policy for state schooling.

In defending Harman, Blair acted characteristically by putting his own position so publicly on the line. He is loyal to his friends and self-certain to the point of rashness. Now, though, he needs to move on from defending a friend to rethinking the policy. In a few days' time he is due to make a major speech on social issues. He should rip it up and try, instead, a speech which confronts honestly and thoughtfully the real dilemmas of schooling in Britain.

If so, he could and should give indications of alternative ways forward. There are some. A voucher system, for instance, could be heavily biased in favour of low-income families so that the daughter of a single parent on welfare would get a voucher worth, say, five times as much as a middle-class child. This would blur the gnarled and class-bound lines which scar British education, and state funding would flow to where it was needed most. Schools in deprived areas or specialising in lower achievers would be able to afford to buy in specialist teachers on high salaries.

This episode has been too bad for Labour to talk of silver linings. For the party there are none; during the past few days all its old vices have been on show. But if he encouraged Blair to think again about schools, the rest of us could yet have cause to raise a glass to Little Joe, whose politician parents behaved like parents – and not like politicians.

Class struggle: education is turning into a litmus test for new Labour Photograph: Hulton Deutsch

A comprehensive failure

The true hypocrisy over selection in schools does not lie in Harriet Harman's torn maternal heart; it lies at the heart of Labour's education policy. The hypocrisy lies in the fact that the not-yet-modernised Blairite party professes to believe in an aspirational, meritocratic society, while remaining bound by its ankles to a discredited comprehensive ideal.

Comprehensive schooling is the ideal form in a liberal democracy. The benefits for mutual understanding, for social cohesion, for not splitting the community into antagonistic bands of privilege and resentment, are ringingly obvious. Moreover, comprehensive schools should in principle be more able to respond to the varied talents that make up every individual.

The problem is that in practice it doesn't work. It doesn't work widely and well enough for any modern political party to sell it as a panacea.

I am as emotionally bound up in the comprehensive ideal as anyone in my comprehensively educated generation. I was proud to belong to that first band of kids who were not artificially separated into a small group of academically able and the less able remainder. But what I actually learnt, academically, was disgracefully poorer than it should have been. I succeeded, in the end, in spite of it. And I was not failed by individual teachers – my teachers were, in several fondly remembered cases, superhuman. It was the ideal that failed because it expected them all to be superhuman.

My generation are today's parents of young children, for whom the Harman dilemma is an urgent, defining issue for the politics of the Nineties. And if new Labour does not tackle that, honestly and openly, it will not deserve the appellation "new".

The problem is that the long and divisive course of our 30-year comprehensive experiment has shown that most schools cannot live up to the egalitarian dream. The best do. Good comprehensives are wonderful, inspiring institutions: but they are in a minority, and we cannot rest our hopes for the future on the fantasy that somehow the rest can be brought up to that high standard by wishful thinking.

Why have comprehensives failed? The answer lies in the impossibility of their ambition. My father fought hard as a politician during the Sixties and Seventies to bring about the introduction of comprehensive schools because he (as a one-nation, grammar school-educated Tory) believed that the separation of children at the age of 11 into sheep and goats created a terrible social chasm. Moreover, he believed that less able children would gain from mixing with academically and socially aspirant children. But he never thought children should all be bundled together as one: he knew that comprehensives would not work unless teachers differentiated among pupils within them.

Labour should stop incanting a flawed ideal

He was right. Comprehensive schooling does provide children with a broader social experience, and sometimes talent rubs off. But, face it, mostly it didn't work out like that. The parental and pupil culture in the overwhelming majority of state schools today is anti-aspirational. Instead of most pupils being lifted to the ambitions of the best, the best pupils come under heavy social pressure to scale their efforts down to the ambitions of the average.

If steering children with different aptitudes into different schools were as a matter of course socially divisive and educationally destructive, why is it that Germany is more socially cohesive, has a narrower range of wealth, is less politically divided and consistently outstrips Britain's educational performance? The Germans separate children (albeit at a later age), as do the French. But they don't separate them down one tunnel that says "Clever" and another that says "Stupid", on the basis of a one-off test. They separate them into academically able, and technically able, and able at all kinds of other things, by assessing them carefully throughout their schooling years. And children move between one school and another: they are not condemned, as many post-war Britons were, to a second-rate secondary modern.

Tragically, in Britain, the 11-plus still defines the argument because we are so desperate to escape its haunting apparition. But it does not have to be like that. Labour should stop incanting a flawed ideal and think radically about how to reinvent state schooling. In so doing, Tony Blair needs to win education professionals, as well as parents, to a new approach.

What is the real objective? Surely it must be to create a schooling system that can meet the diverse expectations of a diverse population. We need schools of many kinds, not just one comprehensive kind, or two selective kinds. In large urban areas, where children can easily travel to a variety of schools, it is surely good to encourage differences. One school might have a particular religious orientation; another might have a famous art department on which it lavishes resources; another might be superbly technically endowed. None of this undermines quality.

And in less densely populated areas, where parents in practice have a choice between one or two schools, selection is possible *within* schools: children can be grouped according to aptitude, enthusiasm, effort and commitment.

Some comprehensive schools do stream, by form, or subject, or both. But many more are too trapped in the mixed-ability mind-set to contemplate a different approach. They need to let go of their old verities and look at the inspectors' and academics' evidence that has mounted over many years in favour of grouping pupils by ability, or by their willingness to learn.

It is no accident that so much fuss has been made about Ms Harman's decision: education is the new Labour litmus test. Is Mr Blair going to create an ambitious, striving, achieving society, eager and enthusiastic to learn? Or is he going to retrench the pointless argument that has distracted us for far too long?

COLIN HUGHES

The writer is former education editor of the 'Independent'

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Market Report: Standard Chartered races away 19

BUSINESS NEWS DESK: tel 0171-293 2530 fax 0171-293 2093
CITY & BUSINESS EDITOR: JEREMY WARNER

Bradford & Bingley triggers mortgage war

NIC CICUTTI

Building societies yesterday began hoisting defences against hostile takeover bids as the Bradford & Bingley cut mortgages rates and raised the return to savers. The Nationwide promised to follow suit within weeks.

Bradford & Bingley, the fifth-largest building society, cut the cost of its home loans to a new low of 7.24 per cent.

The society's bonus to its 1.9 million members, including a pledge of better savings rates, sparked expectations of a fresh mortgage price war with other lenders.

Its move prompted Nationwide, the largest society after Halifax, to say that it too would introduce a "loyalty" package for its 8 million members.

Brian Davis, chief executive at Nationwide, said of his own society's plans: "We will know where we stand by our year-end in April. That will be the time for us to introduce any appropriate changes.

"We have been working carefully, trying to make sure that our capital reserves were sound before making a decision." He added that Nationwide planned to remain competitive as far as mortgage rates were concerned.

John Wriglesworth, director of strategy at Bradford & Bingley, said: "We think that building societies that opt for plc status are making a one-way decision to sell off the family silver. This will leave their customers eating off paper plates in the future. We are giving them silverware, china and the best cuisine for the foreseeable future."

However, Halifax and Abbey National, who have led earlier mortgage-cutting moves, said yesterday they were not planning to follow Bradford & Bingley's example yet.

Bradford & Bingley's giveback, expected to reduce its profits by £50m a year, cuts the cost of an average £50,000 mortgage by about £10 a month.

Over a typical 25-year loan period, an interest-only borrower would save £2,800. Over five years, new and existing borrowers will pay about £550 less. The new rates take effect on 1 March.

Savers will also benefit by the society's pledge to keep rates at an average of 0.25 per cent more than its key competitors.

"This announcement demonstrates the benefits of mutuality in action," Geoffrey Lister, chief executive of the society, said.

Yorkshire Building Society, which offered a similar package to its 1 million members last October, and Britannia, about to launch its own loyalty bonuses, welcomed Bradford & Bingley's move. Its decision follows a series of takeovers and mergers of building societies.

Cheltenham & Gloucester and National & Provincial have been taken over by banks.

Last year, Halifax and Leeds Permanent merged and will de-mutualise in April 1997. Woolwich plans to follow suit shortly after that. An announcement from Alliance & Leicester is imminent.

Mr Wriglesworth said: "In the 1990s, we had better rates than the banks but we also had to face the fact that the housing market had collapsed. We needed to build up our reserves and have been doing so for the last five years. We can now give back some of our profits. We had planned a complicated system based on long-term loyalty bonuses, but some of our members said to us that they might be dead by then."

Rob Thomas, building society analyst at UBS, the Swiss banking group, said: "Having argued for a long time that societies that wanted to stay mutual needed to do something like this, I am not surprised by such a move. I can see this gaining momentum in bits and bobs."

Testing the waters: Brian Davis (left) of Nationwide and Geoffrey Lister, chief executive, of Bradford & Bingley

Holiday blushes for tour operator

DAVID HELLIER and JOHN SHEPHERD

Inspirations, the tour operator that only two weeks ago posted record profits of £7.7m, found itself in an embarrassing situation yesterday over a letter written to its Cypriot hoteliers that spells out reasons for payments delays.

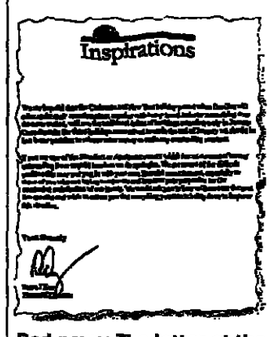
The letter, which appears to have been signed by the finance director of the tour operating subsidiary, Steve Keay, explains that payments problems have occurred for several reasons, including an accounting problem.

The letter describes the problems caused by poor trading conditions in the industry, aircraft leasing payments which have to be paid in order to ensure the continued expansion of the company's holiday programme, and disappointing early bookings for 1996.

The letter concludes: "If you are one of the Hoteliers or Apartment owners which has an amount of money outstanding from unpaid invoices we do apologise ... we would ask you to bear with us over the next few months and wish to assure you that everything possible is being done to improve this situation."

The letter continued: "many in the travel industry have described the 1995 trading year as being one of the worst on record. The public's demand for holidays at lower prices and for heavy discounts to incentives bookings hit tour operators' margins and profits."

Paul Jackson, the finance director, said the leaking of the letter "makes me very very angry". "The company has £55m in the bank and made £7.7m in pre-tax profits. These are the facts," he said. He said letter was erroneous and that it should not have been sent at all. He said it was written by a junior member of staff and added of Mr Keay that "I do not believe he saw it".


Inspirations

Bad news: The letter at the heart of the matter

Jobs to be axed in Cockburn's shake-up for WH Smith

NIGEL COPE

WH Smith's new chief executive, Bill Cockburn, pledged yesterday to shake up the company's sleepy, under-achieving culture in a series of moves that could involve large-scale redundancies at the beleaguered retailer.

Announcing a slump in half-year profits from £45m to £17m, Mr Cockburn criticised poor cost control and weak accountability, saying the company needed to hit targets and budgets "rather than conjuring up excuses for missing them".

He said that the profit performance was "unsatisfactory" and warned that second-half profits were unlikely to exceed last year's £70m. Describing the company's culture as "cosy and complacent", he said: "Sometimes you get that in old mature businesses that think they have a God-given right to survive." Mr Cockburn declined to give details on possible job cuts but said: "If that's what's necessary, that's what will be done." WH Smith has 23,000 workers world-wide, of whom around 20,000 are in the UK.

Mr Cockburn, who joined WH Smith from the Royal Mail at the beginning of the year, said he wanted the group to capitalise on the strength of its brand name and to be more pro-active. It should be able to take advantage of the collapse of the Net Book Agreement, which used to govern book prices. The group has increased book sales by 9 per cent since the end of the agreement in October.

Analysts praised Mr Cockburn's sentiments but said he needed to address the problems at Do It All, the group's DIY joint venture with Boots, which recorded a loss of £7.7m in the six months to 2 December and sales 3.2 per cent lower than the same period last year.

Mr Cockburn refused to be drawn on details ahead of his strategic review, which will not be completed until the spring.

WH Smith's profits for the six months to December were down from £45m to £17m. Sales rose from £1.2bn to £1.3bn.

Operating profits at the core WH Smith chain fell from £26m to £12m, partly due to previously announced provisions. The chain has struggled against competition from the specialist music and booksellers and the supermarkets. Like-for-like sales were 2.6 per cent higher.

Profits at Waterstones, the bookseller, improved from £3m to £5m while Virgin Our Price, the music and video chain that makes most profit in the second half, reported profits of £1.6m, compared with a loss of £800,000 last year. The interim dividend was maintained at 5.25p. The shares were unchanged at 407p.

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Sir Rocco stuns City with Forte buyout plan

MATHEW HORSMAN

Sir Rocco Forte last night stunned the City with a proposed leveraged buyout of the Forte hotel empire from Granada. The assets, which include luxury hotels in Britain and overseas, are worth £2.5bn according to Forte's own figures.

Analysts warned that the new company would be highly leveraged in a sector that demands huge injections of capital.

But few were completely surprised by the dramatic move, pointing out that Sir Rocco had made it clear he intended to return to the hotels business, possibly through a bid for some of the Forte hotels that Granada will sell to help pay off the £2.5bn in debt it took on to finance its £3.8bn hostile offer, which was declared unconditional on Tuesday.

Forte's advisers include SBC Warburg, Cazenove, Morgan Stanley, UBS and JP Morgan. According to Forte, financial discussions have been encouraging. If successful, the group could seek a stock marketing listing.

A concrete proposal is to be made within a few weeks, Sir Rocco said last night. Granada has already lined up several potential buyers for the hotels business, and is expected to drive a hard bargain. ITT-Sheraton, Bass, Accor and Marriott are among the possible buyers. According to Forte's own figures, the assets targeted in the LBO are worth about £2.5bn, but carry about £1bn in debt.

Sir Rocco, along with his sister, Olga Polizzi, are believed to particularly covet the Waldorf-Astoria hotel and the Meridien chain. If successful, the LBO would also give them the Exclusive Hotels and 12 other hotels in London.

Ironically, they would use some of the £300m the Forte family will receive from Granada when they tender their own shares. Sir Rocco is also likely to receive about £200,000 as compensation for the breaking of his management contract.

All told, Granada is selling assets worth £2bn, including its stake in the Savoy Group of hotels. Mr Robinson plans to meet the Savoy management by next week to discuss an orderly disposal of the shares.

Separately, sources at Whitbread rubbished reports that it had failed to support Forte in a last-ditch effort to keep the hotels group independent. According to the reports, Whitbread, which had agreed to buy Forte's restaurants and budget hotels for £1bn if the Granada offer was resisted, was meant to buy Forte shares in the market and to offer up to 400p to buy the pivotal 14 per cent stake held by Mercury Asset Management.

Whitbread is now expected to bid for Forte's Welcome Break motorway service areas, which are being sold by Granada.

Granada said it might overturn the £122m sale of the White Hart hotel chain to Regal Hotels, announced just before Forte succumbed to Granada's £3.8bn bid, because the deal was not done on a cash basis. "In the round, we are unenthusiastic about anything but cash," Mr Robinson said.

Golden handcuffs for Grand Met director

NIGEL COPE

Grand Metropolitan, the food and drinks group which has developed a reputation for richly rewarding its directors, has issued a "golden handcuffs" contract to its latest boardroom appointment.

Paul Walsh, an American who looks after the group's Pillsbury business in the US and who was appointed to the main Grand Met board in October, will be a paid a lump sum of $750,000 plus interest if he is still in the company's employment in seven years. This is in addition to his $910,000 annual salary.

The company said: "Basically it is golden handcuffs with a non-compete and gagging clause. He is running one of the best US food companies and we need to keep up with rival levels of compensation."

Under the terms Mr Walsh qualifies for the payment as long as he undertakes not to join a competing food group within 18 months or divulge details of the company's operations within that time.

He does not receive the payment if he leaves the company within seven years.

Details of the "seven-year itch" scheme follow a year during which Grand Met has paid compensation payments totalling £1.3m to two directors who left the company. Ian Martin, who left the company to become chairman of Unigate, was paid £557,458.

David Nash was paid £790,000, the company confirmed yesterday, when he lost out to John McGrath in the battle for the position of chief executive.

At the other end of the pay scale, the company last month paid £106,000 in compenstion to 900 of its Burger King staff who were told to clock off on unpaid breaks whenever the outlets were quiet.

Meanwhile, Scantronic, the security alarms firm, revealed yesterday a £780,000 payout to former chief executive Chris Brookes hit profits. The payout followed Scantronic's takeover last November by Menvier Swain.

Together with the cost of closing Scantronics's headquarters, the pay-off has caused a £1m exceptional charge that will wipe out any profits made in the second half to April.

Mr Brookes had been on a five-year contract until Scantronic's board negotiated it down to three years shortly before the £10.5m takeover.

He was on a salary of £210,000 plus pension contributions at 15 per cent of salary, at a time when Scantronic had fallen heavily into loss.

Menvier said it will also be writing down the value of Scantronic stock on its balance sheet by £4m in the second half.

Mr Brookes' payout was not the only one to hit Menvier Swain.

Just before Christmas the firm also paid a sum believed to be £250,000 to settle a lawsuit with the former finance director Ray Dias.

Mr Dias left the company after pressure from institutions when Scantronic hit trading problems amid mounting debt in July 1994.

Gardner tipped as British Gas chief

MARY FAGAN
Industrial Correspondent

British Gas concluded a round of sweeping boardroom changes with the appointment as group finance director of Philip Hampton, the 42-year-old finance director of British Steel. Mr Hampton succeeds Roy Gardner, who has taken on a much wider brief and is increasingly regarded as the eventual replacement for the chief executive, Cedric Brown, now seen as the last of the old guard.

Mr Gardner, who joined from GEC in late 1994, takes on the formidable responsibility of renegotiating long-term contracts with North Sea producers, which are forcing the company to buy much more gas than it can sell, often at prices above those available in the market today. At the same time, he will be in charge of the gas supply business at a time when the domestic market is being opened up to competition from rivals, including offshore companies and electricity firms.

British Gas also confirmed that John Whybrew would join the board from Shell, in the newly created role of director for strategic planning and corporate affairs. A spokeswoman said that Peter Sanguinetti, the director for corporate affairs, would continue in his role and report to Mr Whybrew.

Mr Hampton, who is highly regarded by City analysts, receives a £70,000 golden hello in addition to his £295,000 salary. The up-front payment is to compensate him for loss of share options at British Steel, where his package of pay and bonus was almost £290,000.

Mr Whybrew's salary is £275,000 and, as with Mr Hampton and other British Gas directors, he receives neither bonuses nor share options.

SFA fines Panmure over fraud worth £3m

JOHN WILLCOCK
Financial Correspondent

Panmure Gordon, the stockbroker, has been fined £50,000 plus costs of £10,000 and severely reprimanded by the Securities and Futures Authority (SFA) over a £3m fraud by a former employee.

The SFA yesterday criticised Panmure for "inadequate protection of clients' assets, for failure in its control of its internal affairs and for failing to adequately train and properly supervise its staff."

The City regulator also banned the fraudster concerned, Jeremy Gray, from further investment business and ordered him to pay costs of £4,000. Last October Mr Gray was jailed for six years after being convicted of stealing more than £3m. Gray, 27, laundered shares owned by his father and the British Heart Foundation. He did this while working as an assistant to a director in Panmure's private client stockbroking department.

Panmure discovered the frauds in the spring of 1994, seven years after Gray joined the firm. Panmure immediately informed the SFA and the police.

Gray, of Clapham, south London, was convicted last October of theft, false accounting and handling stolen goods. Panmure is still trying to recover money from accounts in Denmark, the Netherlands and Austria.

The SFA said that in January 1994 Mr Gray directed that around £55,000 held by Panmure on behalf of a client should be transferred to a Luxembourg account. In the following month Gray directed the transfer of £3m of stock held in a "depot" account in New York, on behalf of another client, to a third party in New York.

POSTGRADUATE COURSES

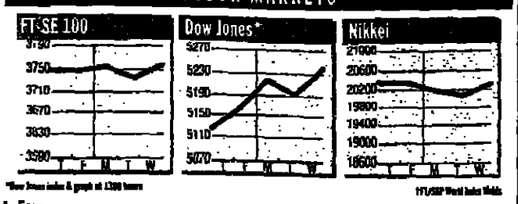
As the *only* official sponsors of the 1996 University of LondonPostgraduate Fair, The Independent is running a postgraduate course feature in Section Two, with specific editorial, details on the fair and pages of courses.

See Pages 16 - 21 Section Two

For further information call the Courses Team on 0171 293 2298

THE INDEPENDENT
INDEPENDENT ON SUNDAY

STOCK MARKETS

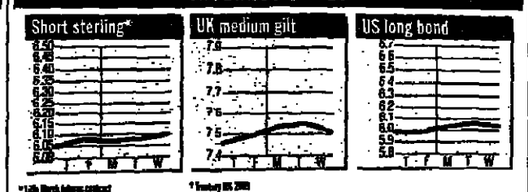


Indices

Index	Close	Day's change	Change(%)	1995/96 High	1995/96 Low	Yield(%)
FTSE 100	3758.20	+23.20	+0.6	3758.20	2954.20	3.80
FTSE 250	4086.90	+14.50	+0.4	4086.90	3300.90	3.59
FTSE 350	1863.90	+10.50	+0.6	1863.90	1482.40	3.76
FT Small Cap	2002.59	+5.70	+0.3	2002.59	1678.61	3.12
FT All Share	1837.17	+9.95	+0.5	1837.17	1469.23	3.71
New York *	5240.32	+48.05	+0.9	5219.36	3832.08	2.27
Tokyo	20312.74	+231.82	+1.2	20669.03	14485.41	0.76†
Hong Kong	10960.21	+2.99	+0.0	10980.21	6967.93	3.38†
Frankfurt	2423.07	+38.60	+1.6	2423.07	1910.96	1.86†

Source: FT Information

INTEREST RATES

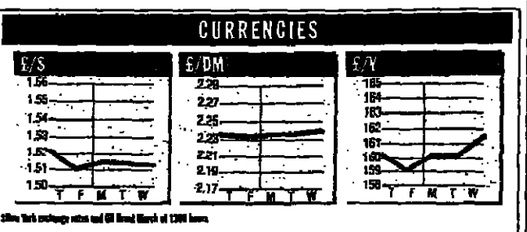


Money Market Rates / Bond Yields *

Index	1 Month	1 Year	Medium Bond (%)	Year Ago	Long Bond	(%) Year Ago
UK	6.25	6.10	7.30	8.74	7.47	8.71
US	5.50	5.19	5.61	7.80	6.04	7.88
Japan	0.41	9.57	1.77	4.71	-	-
Germany	3.44	3.22	5.79	7.54	6.59	-

*Benchmark indices

CURRENCIES



Pound

	Yesterday	Change	Year Ago
$ (London)	1.5130	-0.10c	1.5904
$ (N York)‡	1.5090	-0.30c	1.5915
DM (London)	2.2397	+0.31pf	2.4146
¥ (London)	161.536	+Y1.324	158.542
£ Index	83.1	+0.1	89.0

Dollar

	Yesterday	Change	Year Ago
£ (London)	0.6609	+0.04	0.629
£ (N York)‡	0.6627	+0.13	0.628
DM (London)	1.4803	+0.30pf	1.5183
¥ (London)	106.765	+Y0.945	99.69
$ Index	96.3	+0.3	95.7

MAIN PRICE CHANGES

Rises	Price (p)	Change (p)	Change%	Falls	Price (p)	Change (p)	% Change
British Biotech	2168	198	10.1	Telewest	132.5	4.5	3.3
Std Chartered	662.5	43.5	7.0	Farnell Electronic	600	17	2.8
Bowthorpe	405	21	5.5	Southern Electric	784	21.0	2.6

OTHER INDICATORS

	Yesterday	Day's chg	Year Ago		Index	Latest	Yr Ago	Next Figs
Oil Brent $	17.00	+0.13	16.71	RPI	150.7	+3.2pc	2.9	15 Feb
Gold $	402.90	-0.6	381.35	GDP	106.9	1.8pc	4.2	22 Feb
Gold £	266.29	-0.09	239.124	Base Rates	—	6.25pc	6.75	—

Wait till we see the colour of Rocco's money

COMMENT

'Back comes the Forte family with a highly leveraged bid designed to buy precisely the same assets Granada now needs to sell. How much simpler and less costly if they had all sat down and done this in the first place?'

How seriously should we take Sir Rocco Forte's bid to reclaim at least a part of his empire? The concept is splendidly romantic, as well as making the last two months of bitterly contested takeover battle seem like theatre of the absurd.

Just think of it. Granada bids £3.8bn knowing that to make the bid work it needs to dispose of more than £2bn of assets. Then back comes the Forte family, in conjunction with its advisers and JP Morgan of the US with a highly leveraged bid designed to buy precisely the same assets as Granada now needs to sell – the Meridien chain, the Exclusive hotels and the Savoy stake. How much simpler and less costly if they had all sat down and done this in the first place? Whether it can be made to work depends critically on what Sir Rocco can and is prepared to pay. If he can pay the asset value attributed to these properties in the defence, then Granada may feel obliged to deal. Until we see the colour of Forte's money, however, the offer looks like little more than the bravado of a defeated man.

McAlpine shows way out of insanity

There's nothing like a bid to galvanise otherwise bumbling management. Shareholders in Alfred McAlpine, including the increasingly peeved McAlpine family trusts, can probably thank Amec's half-hearted approach at the end of last year for kick-starting yesterday's withdrawal from the cut-throat construction market.

Investors in the most oversupplied, inefficient sector to clutter British industry must wonder what else has to be done to persuade McAlpine's peers to follow suit. Only in contracting could an industry-wide turnover of around £50bn result in an aggregate loss.

The outlook for the sector is hardly encouraging. Total output fell by 3 per cent in 1995 and forecasts suggest it is unlikely to recover until 1997. The worst of it is in the heavier end of the sector, which is being clobbered by the Government's insistence on sacrificing infrastructure to a housing and consumer recovery. At the same time, low inflation means continuing cost-cutting is the only answer for materials companies.

The recent asset swap between Tarmac and Wimpey and Kvaerner's bid for Amec added a degree of excitement to a sector that has otherwise been a dead loss for four years. But amid the recent action it is easy to forget just how rare such moves are in the contracting business. Beside the recent excitement at Amec, there have only been two hostile takeover bids in this sector in the last 10 years (YJ Lovell for Higgs & Hill and Lilley for Tilbury); both failed and the aggressors went on to suffer severe trading problems with Lilley eventually going bust.

There are several reasons why the insanity of construction is hard to cure. The abundance of small players means reducing capacity among the larger contractors has little effect. With no assets to talk of, contractors' balance sheets are difficult to value, putting off potential bidders. Moreover, merging two companies rarely increases the chances of winning big contracts. Where there were once two bidders for the contract, there is now just one. The normal rationale for mergers (one and one making three) is reversed.

So, McAlpine is right, the only way to solve the mess is to pull out altogether. Whether increasing the company's relative exposure to civil engineering and housebuilding is the answer remains to be seen, but at least the company has shown the disgruntled McAlpine family trusts that it is doing something.

German model loses its looks

Angst is a national condition in Germany, so the self-doubt that has crept into this great powerhouse of the European economy is hardly new. For once, however, Germany is right to worry. There is little doubt that economically things are going badly wrong. The effectiveness of the German government's response to this looming crisis will be watched closely by a wider world, not least in the UK, where the German model is seen as the main inspiration for Tony Blair's stakeholder economy.

Like Daimler-Benz, the German economy shows symptoms of overload. Following the rise in unemployment to nearly 10 per cent, the government has now downgraded its projection for growth this year to only 1.5 per cent. Not only has Germany substantially overshot the Maastricht budget deficit/GDP ratio of 3 per cent, it is set to crash through the debt/GDP ratio of 60 per cent.

The unexpected economic slowdown that started last year is the main cause. That in turn was helped on its way by the appreciation of the mark to record levels against the dollar last spring. But what added salt to the wound was a big jump in wages, with a two-year inflation-busting deal in the key engineering sector. This is clearly proving too much for many companies, given the strong real appreciation of the mark in the 1990s.

Some relief has come from the Bundesbank, with three half-point cuts in the discount rate last year. Yesterday's further easing in the repo rate sent a strong signal that December's discount rate reduction to 3 per cent may not be the last. A further reduction to 2.5 per cent – something that has only occurred once before – now seems odds-on.

As Theo Waigel, the German finance minister, conceded at the Group of Seven meeting in Paris last weekend, the rigidity of European labour markets is itself a cause of slow growth. Ambitious plans agreed by the government and both sides of industry to halve unemployment by the end of the century are an advance in the right direction for they include more flexible working hours, the use of temporary jobs and the expansion of part-time jobs. Collective bargaining between employers' organisations and unions will remain the cornerstone of the German labour market, however.

Those in favour of the German system say that wage co-ordination and direction help to keep down unemployment. The argument is that if the Bundesbank raises interest rates, Germany doesn't have to go through the pain of recession to bring down wages; negotiators will instead take pre-emptive action. By contrast, the sorry post-war experience of the UK is that in an unco-ordinated set-up, workers have to feel the burn before they're willing to ease up on demands for higher wages.

But just because something has worked in the past doesn't mean to say it will always work. Kenneth Clarke has taken the offensive on the great jobs debate, arguing that the flexible labour market is proving more effective in cutting unemployment than the rigid systems in Continental Europe. In the run-up to the Group of Seven jobs summit in Lille this spring, the spotlight is bound to swing onto the jobs crisis on the Continent. The Germans were always going to stick by their system – it has served them well. Yet while the German model has proved its worth in the past, it looks a less attractive guide to the future.

Monopolies chief seeks to bypass ministers

PETER RODGERS
Business Editor

Graeme Odgers, chairman of the Monopolies and Mergers Commission, said yesterday that the Office of Fair Trading should be allowed to make direct references of mergers to the MMC, reducing the ability of ministers to intervene in takeover battles.

His proposal would shift the balance of power from politicians to officials and radically change the background to City takeovers, where ministerial decisions on references are often crucial to the outcome.

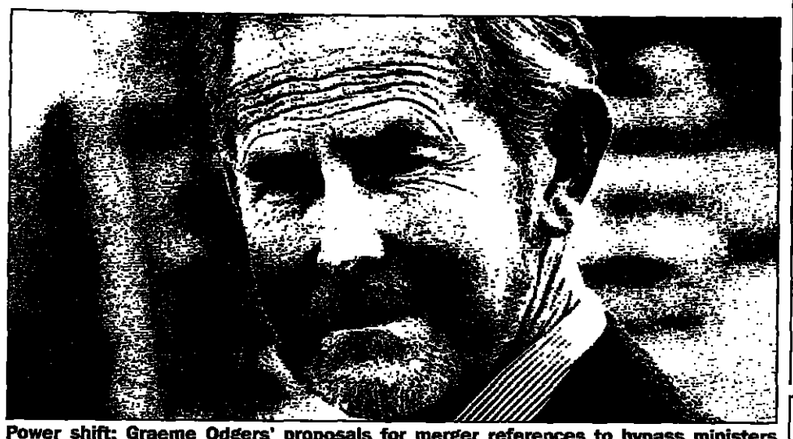
It follows a similar call by John Bridgeman, the director general of fair trading, who said before Christmas that there was a case for giving him the right to bypass ministers in making merger references.

Mr Odgers said the present system "arguably introduces a political input at too early a stage of the regulatory process".

The two most senior competition officials have unveiled their proposals as the Government draws up a detailed consultative document on changes in competition policy, which is to be published in the spring. But the Department of Trade and Industry said there were no plans to change present arrangements for merger references.

These are currently made only by the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry, after receiving advice from the director general of fair trading.

The vast majority of recommendations by the OFT to refer takeovers are in practice accepted by the DTI, but the refusals tend to be high-profile and politically sensitive cases.



Power shift: Graeme Odgers' proposals for merger references to bypass ministers would radically change the background to City takeovers

The OFT said that since 1976 the government had overturned OFT recommendations 19 times, including once under Mr Bridgeman, when Ian Lang, President of the Board of Trade, rejected an inquiry into the takeover of Norweb by North West Water. Recommendations by his predecessor, Sir Bryan Carsberg, were overturned three times. In one of them, the GEC bid for VSEL, the submarine-builder, Sir Bryan said there were no competition grounds for a reference – but the Government sent the bid to the MMC on public interest grounds.

Mr Odgers said that even after giving the OFT the right to make direct references, ministers should retain the power to make their own merger references.

If the move to direct references were accepted, it would bring merger cases into line with monopolies law, where the OFT already sends cases to the MMC without going through ministers first.

With monopolies references, the Government also has the power to veto a reference made by the OFT. But ministers are likely to find that a veto imposed after a decision by the OFT is harder to justify in public than the present system, in which ministers simply reject advice.

Mr Odgers also called on the Government to embark quickly on a number of reforms of competition law. But he made clear that he rejected proposals for a radical change that would merge the OFT and the MMC into a single body and bring British monopolies law in line with European practices.

Mr Odgers backed a strengthening of the investigative powers of the OFT and also giving it powers to put an immediate stop to some anti-competitive practices such as predatory pricing.

At the moment, no action can be taken until after inquiries are completed, and sometimes the businesses affected have collapsed by then.

Mr Odgers said the Government had also recognised the need to replace the Restrictive Trade Practices Act with legislation on the lines of Article 85 of the Treaty of Rome. "I would like to see these changes implemented quickly" he added.

The Government has been promising action for several years but there was no legislation in the Queen's Speech and the next step is only a government paper.

650 jobs cut at Alfred McAlpine

TOM STEVENSON
City Editor

Alfred McAlpine is to shed 650 jobs as it closes its traditional open-tender building business. The shutdown, the latest move in the restructuring of the UK construction sector, will knock a £34m hole in profits for the year to December, sending the company "substantially" into the red.

Despite the prospect of losses, the news was welcomed by the City, which pushed McAlpine's shares 10p higher to 158p. Many companies have trumpeted their refusal to join in the cutthroat tendering competition for building work, but few have acted as positively to withdraw from the overcrowded market.

All the job losses are in the building division, where 350 staff are to go immediately and another 300 to follow. The move represents a dramatic cutback for the company, which employs about 4,000, including 900 in the US. It is the latest stage in a reduction that has seen the number employed in the industry fall by 500,000 to 1.3 million since 1989.

McAlpine's decision leaves it evenly balanced between housebuilding and civil engineering. The company also plans to set up a "special projects" division, to focus on jobs such as new football stadiums, hospitals and leisure industry building works.

The withdrawal follows the announcement of a large asset swap between Tarmac and Wimpey and the withdrawal of several large contracting businesses from their housebuilding operations. All the moves have been in response to wafer-thin margins that have seen much of the UK building industry struggling to recover from the recession that started more than five years ago.

The restructuring of McAlpine's contracting division comes after a difficult period for the company in which it has been publicly criticised by its largest shareholder, the McAlpine family trusts, and approached in an unsuccessful bid attempt by rival Amec.

Last September a leaked letter from Sir Chips Keswick, acting on behalf of the McAlpine family, which still holds 15 per cent of the shares, said: "We have lost any confidence that we may have had that the present senior executive management is capable of rebuilding the group's profitability."

McAlpine's non-executive chairman leaves the company in May following the annual meeting and earlier this week a new finance director, Gavin Morris from Norcros, was appointed.

Oliver Whitehead, chief executive, said: "Although the costs will result in the group reporting a substantial loss for 1995, the reorganisation is expected to lead to significant profit improvement."

He said it had been a difficult decision to pull out of what had been a core business, but warned that the division had produced disappointing results for some time and was showing no signs of improvement.

"Some people think it will get better in 1996/97 as the Government hands out sweeties ahead of the general election – but we don't agree", he said.

Imports push non-EU deficit up by £2.4bn

DIANE COYLE
Economics Correspondent

Britain's deficit in trade with countries outside the EU soared by £2.4bn to £7.5bn last year, despite a record surplus on trade in cars. Yesterday's figure suggested that the full trade deficit for 1995, due next week, is likely to be more than £12bn, compared with £10.7bn the previous year.

The biggest-ever deficit with North America, at more than £1.8bn, lay behind the weaker non-EU trade performance. The gap between imports and exports turned £2bn for the worse as the US economy slowed.

Imports of 'intermediate' goods such as microchips and electronic components surged, and there were also unusually high imports of silver in the second half of the year.

However, there was an £800m surplus on trade in cars, the highest since the series began. Thanks to a 25 per cent jump in exports, this was twice the previous year's surplus.

The overall gap widened to £613m in December, up from £436m. Even so, the figure was better than expected and City economists suggested that the trend could be stabilising.

The volume of imports – excluding oil and erratic items – jumped 6 per cent in the month, compared with a 1.5 per cent rise in exports. But their growth has been similar over the past three months taken together.

"Underlying export volumes are back on a clearly upwards trend," said Kevin Darlington, an economist at the brokers Hoare Govett.

During 1995 as a whole there was a 6 per cent increase in export volumes, with imports up 5 per cent. There were particularly big advances in imports of food, beverages and tobacco – mainly meat and fruit and vegetables – and finished manufactures.

Imports of basic materials and semi-finished manufactures were higher year-on-year, but fell sharply during the last quarter of the year.

Michael Saunders, UK economist at Salomon Brothers, said this fitted with survey evidence that firms were cutting back stock levels, which had built up rapidly earlier in the year.

Import prices rose significantly more than export prices due to the surge in commodity prices earlier in the year and the pound's decline.

Import prices were 11 per cent higher than in 1994, compared with a 6 per cent increase in export prices.

Some analysts suggested that British exporters had taken advantage of the fall in the pound last year to build profit margins rather than sales. If so, exports could be hit by weaker growth overseas this year.

IN BRIEF

Optimism on rates sends Dow soaring

Hopes that US interest rates will fall next week were boosted yesterday by weaker-than-expected figures for industrial output in December. The news drove the Dow Jones industrials index up more than 50 points to a record 5,242.48 by late morning before retreating slightly. **writes Diane Coyle.**

Treasury bonds gain more than half a point. Separate figures showing Japan's annual trade surplus with America had shrunk for the first time for five years took the dollar to its highest level for nearly two years. It rose more than a yen to ¥106.95 before closing at ¥106.82 in London. It also rose above DM1.48, partly due to a further reduction yesterday in the German Bundesbank's repo rate, a key money market interest rate. The pound fell slightly to $1.5130.

Bellway swoops on Wainhomes shares

Troubled housebuilder Wainhomes went on bid alert yesterday after rival Bellway took advantage of the recent plunge in its share price to pick up a 4.8 per cent stake. Alan Robson, finance director of Bellway, denied the two companies were in discussions that might lead to an offer, saying only that the shares looked attractive at last week's low of 66p compared with net assets per share in the latest balance sheet of 95p. Wainhomes shares rose 10p yesterday to close at 90p.

M&S reports strong Christmas trade

Marks & Spencer has reported an upbeat Christmas trading statement, though sales in France were seriously affected by the strikes in Paris. Group sales in the five weeks to 30 December were up 6.5 per cent. Sales in the 12 weeks to the same date were 4.7 per cent ahead of the same period last year with general merchandise up 4.8 per cent and food sales up 4.4 per cent. M&S will open its first German store in Cologne this autumn.

£870m Welsh Water bid cleared

The Government has cleared the £870m bid by Welsh Water for South Wales Electricity after the water group gave undertakings demanded by Ian Byatt, the industry watchdog. Welsh has said it will seek a separate listing for the core water operations for the issue of new preference shares.

NM Rothschild to announce strategy

Sir Evelyn de Rothschild today announces the future strategy of the family-owned merchant bank. He is expected to tell staff that NM Rothschild will pursue its independence strategy as an international boutique, focusing on advisory services. Rothschild was approached last year by NatWest Group, interested in some form of co-operation to shore up its corporate finance activities.

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THE INVESTMENT COLUMN
Edited by TOM STEVENSON

Sleepy WH Smith needs shaking

WH Smith's new chief executive, Bill Cockburn, made all the right noises yesterday though it must be difficult to sound positive when you are announcing half-year profits of just £17m on sales of £1.3bn together with a profits warning for the second half.

The former head of the Post Office spoke enthusiastically about shaking up Smith's sleepy culture (shades of the Post Office), cutting costs and being more pro-active rather than just sitting back and waiting for others to take the initiative. His view is that, like Boots, WH Smith has a strong brand name on the high street but must make better use of it. He wants Smith to become the first name in childrens education and hobbies. He is also keen to increase the core chain's average customer spend, which is less than £5 .

These are all good points but could prove harder to implement than he hopes. As Mr Cockburn no doubt found at the Post Office, changing a corporate culture is a long, hard slog, measured in years, not months. Cutting costs will be welcome but if these include large-scale redundancies, the next set of figures is likely to be scarred by large provisions.

WH Smith must also face its structural problems. Its key difficulty is that it is caught between specialist stores and the supermarkets, which are increasingly moving into music and videos. Smith's problems are exacerbated by the fact that its own specialist chains, such as Waterstones and Virgin Our Price, are cannibalising the main stores more than management admits.

The group also needs fewer formats. Here the obvious headache is Do It All, the loss-making DIY joint venture with Boots. Smith's share of the loss was £7.7m in the six months to December and could be as high as £16m for the full year. Like-for-like sales were 3 per cent down in the half-year and with Texas Homecare being absorbed by Sainsbury's Homebase, the group faces an increasingly competitive market.

The company is refurbishing stores and closing others but more radical action is necessary. Closure or the sale of its 50 per cent share to Boots may be the answer, though this would be expensive and Boots is unlikely to be willing.

For shareholders, much will depend on the results of Mr Cockburn's strategic review, which will not be completed until the spring. In the meantime the company – and the shares – are likely to remain in limbo. After last year's profits warning, the shares have already enjoyed a bounce but remained unchanged by yesterday's news at 407p.

BZW has downgraded its full-year profits forecast from £95m to £85m which puts the shares on a forward rating of 20. High enough.

Textile sector worth a spin

It is little wonder the textiles sector has been such a dull area of the stock market over the past year. The industry has been squeezed between soaring raw material prices on the one hand, and depressed sales caused by consumer diffidence and an exceptionally warm summer on the other. After running up through the early part of 1995, shares in the sector have now come all the way back down, leaving the FT-SE textiles & apparel index just 1 per cent higher than where it was a year ago.

But the index has already rebounded from a level not seen since last year, when raw material price worries were at their worst, and there are plenty of more tangible reasons to be bullish about textiles. The rise in raw material prices now seems to be past its worst, with near-term cotton contracts currently changing hands at around 85 cents a pound, compared with around $1.20 nine months to a year ago. Meanwhile, base rate cuts and tax reductions should provide a boost to high street spending in 1996, an expectation given some support by the generally optimistic tone of recent Christmas trading statements from retailers.

The imponderable remains the weather, but the chances are that 1996 will not repeat the record temperatures of last year, providing more incentive for consumers to go out and spend.

Investors looking to dip into textiles could do worse than look at Coats Viyella, which is well managed and has dumped a number of commodity businesses in the past year. Coats warned in December that the warm weather would hit last year's profits, which are expected by brokers Granville Davies to be around £146m. But they should rise to £166m in the current year, putting the shares down 2p at 194.5p on a prospective multiple of 13.

Dewhirst, a major supplier to Marks & Spencer, which has been revitalised by new management, is another stock worth a second look. The shares, up 1p at 184p, now stand on forward price/earnings of 15, based on Granville's forecast of £22.5m current year profits. But, after outperforming the market by 16 per cent last year, they may be in for a period of consolidation.

Frost is petrol war casualty

The appointment of Christopher Walsh, an oil industry veteran, to the board of Frost did little for the embattled petrol station group's shares yesterday. The price dropped another 4p to 155p, taking the fall over the past week to 14 per cent. Even with his 30 years of experience in the business, the new non-exective director will have his work cut out to reverse the problems facing Frost.

The body blow came last week, when Esso launched a big petrol price war by extending its price watch campaign to the whole country. At a stroke, the market's leading petrol retailer reduced its prices to the level of the supermarkets', which have carved out 22 per cent of the market from a standing start only a few years ago. Six days into the campaign, the signs are that the big store groups have yet to respond to Esso's move by reducing their own prices. But the threat remains and analysts have already slashed 1996 profits forecasts for Frost by around £6m to £15m.

Frost is exposed because of last year's £83m deal to buy Burmah Castrol's petrol station business. The acquisition came close to doubling the group, bringing in 182 owned sites to add to the existing chain of 240 and 807 supply contracts to independent outlets.

In the light of the savage competitive environment, the Petrol Retailers' Association is forecasting that 70 per cent of the 10,000 independents will be forced out of business over the next two years. When it bought the Burmah business in June, Frost predicted it would lose 300 of its supply contracts in two years.

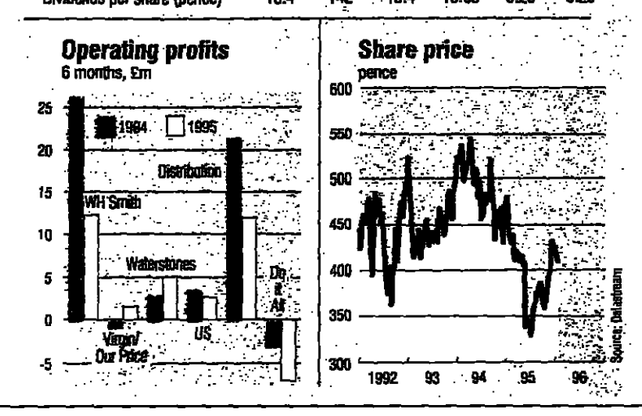
In fact, that has already happened and the company expects it could end up with as few as 300 in total.

The Esso move was in the wind at the time of the Burmah deal and James Frost, the chairman, has shown himself adept at weathering previous storms in the industry. But, despite a prospective price/earnings multiple of just 11, the shares are best avoided for now.

WH Smith: at a glance

Market value: £1.14bn, share price 407p

Trading record	1992	1993	1994	1995	1995 (Half year)	1996 (Half year)
Turnover (£bn)	2.13	2.31	2.44	2.69	1.21	1.36
Pre-tax profits (£m)	108.1	113.8	834	100.9	45.2	17.3
Earnings per share (pence)	31.2	31.1	19.9	23.9	11.2	4.0
Dividends per share (pence)	13.4	142	15.4	15.65	5.25	5.25



Simon Pincombe CITY DIARY

A day of triumph for Anglo-Saxon pluck

The champagne atmosphere at yesterday's Granada annual meeting is flattened by the irritating intervention of the ubiquitous old buffer with a point of order (it must be the same person who goes to them all). This one has a plum in his mouth and insists on confounding the still-jubilant board with irrelevant and incomprehensible observations and questions.

The first of many noted that Alex Bernstein, the Granada chairman, must now be prepared to work within the G30 group of industrialised nations and not just G7 – because the bigger group includes the Philippines. Mr Bernstein's response was to stare blankly for a while before assuring the malcontent that Granada was an equal opportunity employer

But it did not stop there More trivia followed. And still more. Then, pretending to be unimpressed by explanations on aspects of the report and accounts, the buffer demanded the chairman use "simple Anglo-Saxon words" to put his message across.

"Actually, I'm a great believer in short Anglo-Saxon words," retorted Mr Bernstein to resounding cheers from the floor.

Grim news from the Central Statistical Office and we are not talking about the trade figures. The relentless drive for a leaner Whitehall machine has meant the end to the time-honoured practice of serving coffee and biscuits at economic briefings. The complimentary glass of wine at "very important economic briefings" is also history.

The costs savings are expected to be enormous. The contract caterer Gardner Merchant (once owned by Forte) has been charging the Government 75p for each truly dreadful cup of coffee.

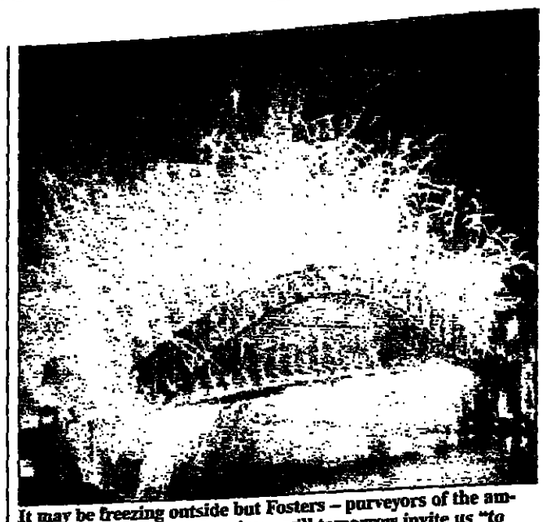
The Christmas party of the solicitors Davies Arnold Cooper is still causing reverberations throughout the legal profession. It seems the firm's credit controller – one Barry Desouza – did a turn with six lawyers and a secretary which went down barnstormingly well.

Featuring such contemporary classics as 'Mustang Sally', 'Honky Tonk Woman' and 'Addicted to Love', it was an accomplished set by all accounts. And the reviews are terrific. "The man is tipped to be the next Luther Vandross," notes the trade magazine, *The Lawyer*.

Certainly Mr Desouza is not your average credit controller. He has sung with Womack and Womack and the Style Council and is in much demand on the London circuit. The backing band (called The Limitations) is also reaching for the stars and should have no trouble negotiating a recording contract should the offer come along.

No comment from the deflated Forte camp on the sudden reappearance of one of Sir Rocco's long-lost flames in a Little Chef in Surrey. The odds must have been greater than a National Lottery jackpot. Simone Knightley, a blonde designer and university lecturer from Dorset, just happened to pop into the cafe with her husband while on her way home from India. There she just happened to bump into a reporter from the *Daily Telegraph* who had been dispatched to get background colour on the final day of the bid. "I used to be Rocco's girlfriend," she announced to the incredulous hack.

And yes. She chose the Linda McCartney veggie burger.



It may be freezing outside but Fosters – purveyors of the amber nectar to a grateful nation – will tomorrow invite us "to celebrate the Australian way of life" with the biggest beer promotion campaign ever seen in the UK. For the less cultured, tomorrow is Australia Day and the brewer is to unveil a £5m campaign to take 1,000 Britons on a "dream holiday" Down Under. The airlift will involve nine special Qantas flights to Sydney (above) where the 1,000 winners of a national competition called Fostralia 1,000 (I'm afraid so) will be let loose among the barbies with more lager than they can handle.

Insurers face £500m storm bill

NIC CICUTTI

Insurance companies face a bill of up to £500m to meet claims after the storm damage suffered in Scotland and the North of England a few weeks ago, fresh research revealed yesterday.

Up to 3.5 million people may have been affected by the storms, which led to a big freeze and power cuts in many areas.

But it was the subsequent thaw that led to massive damage from burst pipes, both to commercial premises and private households, according to the study, by Willis Faber & Dumas, the reinsurance group.

The report's findings, which classed the freeze as the third-most expensive for the industry in a generation, clash with earlier estimates by UK insurers. For some time afterwards, they insisted claims against them were likely to be minimal.

Willis Faber & Dumas said yesterday that the high bill of between £300m and £500m was caused by the failure of electrical supplies, which led to large numbers of burst pipe claims.

Many firms were putting in claims for business interruption with a further widespread impact on industry following water shortages caused by burst water supply pipes. Despite this problem, brewers and distillers were unaffected, the report said.

Household claims averaged between £500 and £1,000, with some exceptional cases of up to £10,000 being reported.

On the business side, a number of commercial losses of more than £750,000 each have been reported to insurers.

Willis Faber & Dumas said yesterday that the scale of claims could cost between 3 and 5 per cent of total property insurance income for the year.

Oliver Peterken, director of research at Willis Faber & Dumas, said: "We based our paper on the worst-case scenario, that there were 500,000 units damaged. But the market is starting to see commercial losses coming in which are much higher.

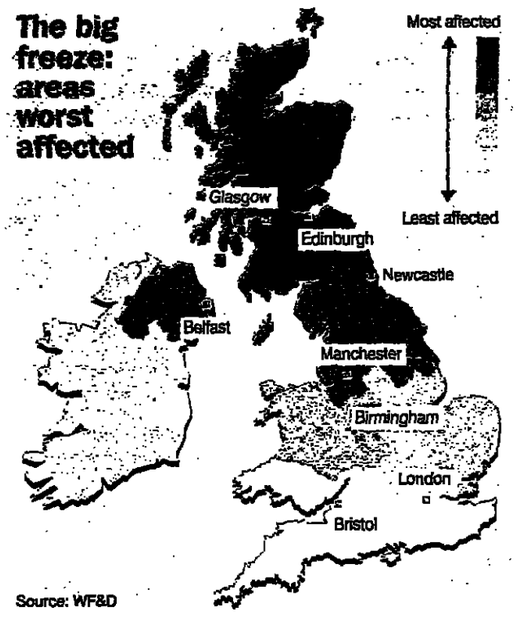
"The important thing is the volume of claims rather than the average cost of each claim. We estimate a bill of up to £300m for households, with commercial losses thereafter.

"The thing to remember is that for a domestic customer a flood is an unpleasant event. For an industrial customer it is not just damage to property but business interruption – those can take time to come in and will be more expensive.

"I would not expect this to have an impact on premiums. This is the kind of thing insurance companies budget for."

Chris Dore, personal claims manager at Eagle Star, said: "We guessed the number of claims roughly right, but there is no doubt that the value of many claims has been rather more than we anticipated. There have been quite a lot of serious instances of damage, which in the early days we did not expect.

"It was difficult to get plumbers out initially and there was so much emergency work that our immediate reaction was to make sure the insured was okay rather than assess initial costs. The scale of claims was more serious than first assumed, but still within bounds that should not materially affect our results or lead to an increase in premiums for policyholders."



CU premium income up 60%

NIC CICUTTI

Commercial Union, one of the UK's largest insurers, yesterday bucked the trend facing other parts of the life industry by announcing that its world-wide life and pension premiums increased by almost 60 per cent to £2.4bn.

A substantial part of the increase came from the company's French subsidiary, Abeille vie, bought in October 1994 as part of CU's takeover of Groupe Victoire. Abeille vie's single-premium business rose 115 per cent to £1.49bn.

However, the difficulties facing other insurers were reflected in CU's UK results, which showed new annual premium income fell 26 per cent to £40m.

More positively, the company's single-premium business in the UK rose 38 per cent to £345m, boosted largely by sales of its classic investment bond.

World-wide, new annual premiums, the amount investors are prepared to save on a regular basis, rose 12 per cent to £238m.

The company's increase in premium income marks a further stage in its strategy of world-wide diversification, with a growing emphasis on life and pensions business to replace its previous reliance on general insurance activities.

CU said that in the Netherlands, growth in new annual premiums increased by 5 per cent while new single premiums rose by 17 per cent. Elsewhere in Europe, new premium income rose by 31 per cent and single premiums by 24 per cent.

Biotech shares make another leap

MAGNUS GRIMOND

Shares in British Biotech, the biotechnology group, leapt to a new peak yesterday following buying by one of the directors. The price closed at £21.68, up 198p on the day, meaning the shares have more than doubled since the November announcement of promising results from trials of the group's Marimastat anti-cancer drug sent the price soaring.

Yesterday's move seems to have been prompted by the acquisition of 3,000 shares at £18.05 by Henny de Ruiter, who recently joined the board as a non-executive director.

Mr de Ruiter, a Dutchman, is an old contact of John Raisman, the Biotech chairman, who knew him at Shell, where he sits on the board. He is also a director of Heineken and Aegon, the giant Dutch insurance group.

Apart from Mr de Ruiter's purchases, the company could not account for yesterday's sharp price movement. Trading in the shares was strong yesterday, with turnover of 683,000 shares. Buying may have been spurred by two brokers' recommendations last week, when Morgan Stanley moved Biotech from "buy" to "strong buy" and the US house First Boston also issued a buy note.

At the end of November, the share price soared 48 per cent to £15.48 in one day after the company released results apparently showing that cancerous tumours responded to treatment with Marimastat.

IN BRIEF

Quitting insurance costs Xerox $1.5bn

Xerox Corporation, the US photocopier giant, has reported a loss of $1.09bn in the fourth quarter after a $1.55bn one-off charge. The provision related to the group's disengagement from insurance operations, leaving a loss for the year of $472m or $5.26 a share, fully diluted, compared with earnings of $794m in 1994. Revenues from the core document processing business rose to $4.8bn in the fourth quarter from $4.6bn, and to $16.6bn for the whole of 1995, up from $15.1bn the previous year.

Pub operator to buy more sites

Surrey Free Inns, the AIM-listed southern pub operator, has provisionally agreed to buy 10 more sites for its Litten Tree "super-pub" chain. The new outlets are set to open towards the end of this financial year. The announcement came as Surry unveiled a 54 per cent surge in pre-tax profits to £606,000 in half-year to 19 November. The interim dividend is hoisted a quarter to 1p.

Ad agency ahead after float

Media Business Group, the advertising buying agency, has reported record profits in its first results since flotation last September. The pre-tax figure jumped 30 per cent to £412,000 in the six months to October. The maiden dividend is being brought forward from the forecast date of October, with an interim payment of 0.03p declared.

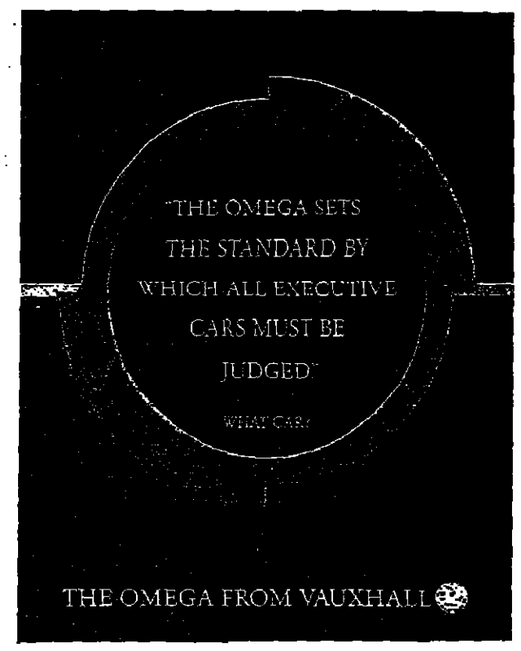
Australian small company trust rejects bid

The board of NM Smaller Australian Companies Trust has called on shareholders to reject the hostile bid from Pacific Assets Trust. After discussions with PAT and other possible bidders, the directors' terms have not been met. These include seeking a continued exposure to Australia for investors and obtaining a cash or near-cash alternative to a share offer.

COMPANY RESULTS

	Turnover £	Pre-tax £	EPS	Dividend
Denton (I)	0.05m (0.24m)	-0.03m (-0.03m)	-0.04p (-0.06p)	nil (nil)
Media Business Grp (I)	49.0m (44.1m)	0.41m (0.32m)	0.12p (0.1p)	0.03p (-)
Mowlem-Swain Grp (I)	45.5m (6.09m)	5.9m (5.2m)	8p (6.9p)	1.85p (1.6p)
Prospect Inds (F)	81.9m (57.4m)	-21.3m (5.9m)	-7.24p (2.35p)	0.025p (0.56p)
WH Smith (I)	1.36bn (1.23bn)	17.3m (45.2m)	4p (11.2p)	5.25p (5.25p)
Shield (I)	0.52m (2.13m)	-0.18m (-0.32m)	-6.1p (-5.7p)	nil (nil)
Surrey Free Inns (I)	5.79m (5.50m)	0.61m (0.39m)	6p (3.8p)	1p (3.8p)

(F) - Final (I) - Interim (N) - Nine months



Fokker collapse could put 1,500 Shorts jobs at risk

RUSSELL HOTTEN

Shorts Brothers, the Belfast aerospace company, warned last night that 1,500 jobs would be at risk from the collapse of Fokker, the Dutch aircraft maker.

Bombardier, which owns Shorts, confirmed that it may form part of a rescue bid for Fokker, which on Tuesday sought creditor protection after owner Daimler-Benz withdrew financial aid.

Shorts, which employs 6,800, has about 700 staff working directly on manufacturing wings for the Fokker 100 and Fokker 70 jets and a further 800 involved in making Fokker components and support services.

The Belfast company said it had received confirmation that its financial exposure would be covered, and the company would continue wing production on a slightly reduced schedule. Rolls-Royce and Dowty, part of TI Group, also supply Fokker.

Shorts said that some employees working on Fokker operations would be transferred to other production lines.

The Dutch government said that it was talking to several potential purchasers. It is thought these include IPTN, an Indonesian state-run company. Aircraft makers from Korea, China and Brazil could also gain from Fokker's expertise in the design and manufacture of 70-125-seater aircraft. Leo Steijn, a Fokker spokesman, confirmed the company is holding talks with outside partners, but declined to give details.

However, Michel Lord, vice-president of Bombardier, told the Dutch media last night that the company might consider the acquisition of all or part of Fokker.

Mr Steijn said Fokker had enough cash in hand to continue for the time being. The company is negotiating with the government on early payment for four Fokker 60s for the Defence Ministry and one executive jet for the royal family.

Further division between Holland and Germany opened up yesterday as Hans Wijers, the Dutch Economics Minister, criticised Daimler-Benz for refusing to compromise on a rescue plan. Daimler had demanded government money. Meanwhile, Daimler accused the Dutch government of abandoning its aerospace industry.

The Advanta Visa Card

Notice to Cardholders of Interest Change

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market report/shares

DATA BANK

FT-SE 100
3758.2 +23.2

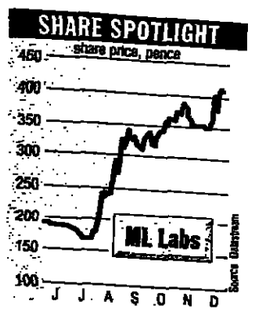
FT-SE 250
4086.9 +14.5

FT-SE 350
1863.9+10.5

SEAQ VOLUME
861.5m shares, 35,948 bargains

Gilts Index
96.15 +0.17

SHARE SPOTLIGHT



Standard Chartered races away on takeover rumours

The share price of **Standard Chartered Bank** raced away in late dealings yesterday, and finished the trading session 43.2p higher at 662.5p on strong rumours of a takeover bid from either the cash-rich **National Westminster Bank** or BankAmerica.

American investors were again said to be picking up stock in Standard which, largely due to sustained bid speculation and a better than expected trading performance across its extensive Asian banking network, has seen its share price soar over the last year from a low point of 247p. The latest price values Standard at almost £6.5bn.

Banking analysts find the bid rumours difficult to fathom. Standard's book value at the end of last year was £1.7bn, posing a £4.7bn goodwill problem for any would-be bidder.

An additional problem is whether Tan Sri Khoo Teck Puat would sell his 14.95 per cent stake.

The bank's profits have recovered strongly since the disastrous performance in 1992. Profits before tax in 1994 climbed from £401m to £510m, and analysts are predicting a result for the year just finished in excess of £650m.

NatWest, ahead 6p to 674p, is flush with cash from the recent £2.3bn disposal of NatWest Bancorp in the US, but analysts said yesterday there was very little logic in it making a move for Standard.

They added that **HSBC**, 19p higher at £10.97p, would make a better suitor, but even then there are considerable overlaps in Hong Kong and other regions in the Far East that would make a deal unattractive.

Banking shares generally were yesterday buoyed by the further cut in German repo rates, rekindling thoughts about additional reductions in

MARKET REPORT

JOHN SHEPHERD

European interest rates – a move that dealers said was likely to be set in motion by France, which some were betting to announce a cut in rates today.

Barclays closed with a 6p advance to 785p, **Royal Bank of Scotland** gained 7p to 588p, and **Bank of Scotland** put on 3p to 304.5p.

Bid rumours and a very strong opening on Wall Street were the prime talking points and drove the FT-SE 100 share index up by 23.2 points to an all-time high of 3,758.2.

The opening 50-point surge in the Dow Jones index owed much to weak industrial output figures, lifting hopes that the Federal Reserve would soon also cut rates.

Buyers were out in force in the London market. More than 861 million shares were dealt, spread across 36,000 bargains.

The crop of bid rumours grows ever larger. There is hardly a sector untainted by speculation that a takeover bid is imminent.

Pub and restaurant shares became the subject of numerous rumours yesterday, with dealers willing to punt on anything viewed as a target for **Whitbread**, 6.5p better at 690.5p, following its failure to buy the Happy Eater and Little Chef chains from Forte.

Several shares in the pub and restaurant group finished at all-time highs. The speculative list included **JD Wetherspoon**, which climbed 18p to a record 734p, **Regent Inns**, which also hit a peak with a 9p gain to 729p, and **My Kinda Town**, 12p higher at 132p.

Renewed bid rumours pushed **Vaux**, the Sunderland-based brewer, up by 6p to 298p. **Wolverhampton and Dudley Breweries**, tipped as a predator, firmed a penny to 590p.

Whitbread is emerging as the front runner to acquire the Welcome Break motorway service stations that **Granada**, which soared 29p to 707p, has to sell. **Bass**, up 4p to 736p, is viewed as a buyer of the Meridien hotel chain that Granada has pledged to sell.

Greenalls Group added another 8p to hit a fresh peak of 612p, and looks set to replace Forte in the FT-SE 100 index.

Grist for the rumour mill was also in plentiful supply on the USM and AIM markets.

ML Laboratories was a late mover, rising a penny to 411p just before the closing bell. There is talk that the company will soon announce a big deal with **Glaxo Welcome**, 11p higher at 911p.

The story goes that Glaxo will manufacture ML's anti-viral drug, which is being tested on four Aids patients at London's Hammersmith Hospital. Results from the tests are expected early next month. Glaxo, the speculators added, may throw a protective fence around any deal by buying a large share stake in ML.

British Biotechnology had another storming session, surging 198p to £21.68p on talk of a promising results from tests its cancer drug. Other biotech and pharmaceutical shares recorded advances amid strong buying by American investors.

TAKING STOCK

❑Magnum Power's volatile shares were one of the day's best performers, surging 15p to 141p. The Scottish inventor of power back-up systems for computers is rumoured to be close to signing supply deals with several leading computer companies. One dealer said the first would be announced soon and would be with Compaq of the US. Shares traded as high as 195p last year, and some dealers believe the price could rocket beyond 200p.

❑The arrival of Donald Trump in London sparked gossip that he was here to cast an acquisitive eye over the capital's top casinos. The main target was said to be London Clubs International. Shares finished the day 9p up at 468p. Capital Group, which runs the high-rollers' paradise, Crockfords, firmed 1p to 212p.

Share Price Data

Prices are in sterling except where stated. The yield is last year's dividend, grossed up by 20 per cent, as a percentage of the share price. The price/earnings (P/E) ratio is the share price divided by last year's earnings per share, excluding exceptional items.
Other details: xr Ex rights x Ex-dividend xa Ex all u Unlisted Securities Market s Suspended pp Partly Paid pm Nil Paid Shares. Source: Finstat.

The Independent Index

The index allows you to access real-time share prices by phone from Seaq. Simply dial 0891 123 335, followed by the 4-digit code printed next to each share. To access the latest financial reports dial 0891 1233 followed by one of the two-digit codes below.

FT-SE 100 – Real-time	00	Sterling Rates	04	Privatisation Issues	36
UK Stock Market Report	01	Bullion Report	05	Water Shares	39
UK Company News	02	Wall St Report	20	Electricity Shares	40
Foreign Exchange	03	Tokyo Market	21	High Street Banks	41

Anyone with a tone-dial telephone can use this service. For a detailed description of The Independent Index, including its portfolio facility, phone 0891 123 333. For assistance, call our helpline 0171 873 4375 (9.30am - 5.30pm).
Calls cost 39p per minute (cheap rate), and 49p at all other times. Call charges include

Market leaders: Top 20 volumes

Stock	Vol'000	Stock	Vol'000	Stock	Vol'000	Stock	Vol'000
British Gas	1500000	BT	1200000	British Steel	990000	WPP	870000
Sears	1400000	BP	1100000	Lucas	980000	Granada	850000
Pilkington	1300000	Lloyds TSB	1100000	Tomkins	980000	ASDA Group	820000
National Grid	1300000	Laporte	1000000	Hanson	910000	RKI	770000
Smith (W.H.)	1200000	Forte	1000000	LASMO	900000	Glaxo Wellcome	740000

FT-SE 100 index hour by hour

Open 3730.5 down 4.5	11.00 3747.2 up 12.2	14.00 3735.6 up 0.6
09.00 3742.3 up 7.3	12.00 3746.0 up 11.0	15.00 3737.2 up 2.2
10.00 3749.8 up 14.8	13.00 3742.8 up 7.8	16.00 3739.4 up 14.4
		Close 3758.2 up 23.2

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Government Securities

Index-linked
Shorts
Mediums
Longs
Undated

Rights Issues

Stock	Price	Chg
Barclay Group	40pm	
Bisco Holdings	7p	
Pentos	37pm	
SWP Group	24p	-1
Sedgwick Plc	49pm	
Shire Pharma	4p	
Western Selection		

Recent Issues

Stock	Price	Chg
Bahamas Hotels	61	
Century Inns	98	
Car Insurance	98	
Cmetek	125	
Jupiter Split Cap	98	
Jupiter Split Inc	98	
Jupiter Split Units	98	
Mountcashel	4	
Nthn Peter Wtrs	98	
Revolution Piccadilly	105	
ShirePharma B Wrts	61	
Vavern	175	

unit trusts/data

Foreign Exchange Rates

STERLING Country	Spot	1 month	3 months	DOLLAR Spot	1 month	3 months	D-MARK Spot
US	1.5130	11-9	30-27	1.000	—	—	0.6765
Canada	2.0708	18-8	50-37	1.3687	0-3	0-5	0.9246
Germany	2.2397	58-51	156-147	1.4803	25-23	73-70	1.0000
France	7.5797	131-105	324-285	5.0758	46-36	99-94	3.4229
Italy	2408.7	62-77	189-213	1592.0	65-72	183-195	1075.46
Japan	161.54	86-87	237-231	106.77	49-48	133-131	72.239
ECU	1.2191	16-7	37-26	1.2412	2-4	5-8	0.5443
Belgium	46.056	13-10	35-29	30.440	57-47	165-140	20.5634
Denmark	8.6827	150-117	434-341	5.7255	50-40	170-120	3.8678
Netherlands	2.5086	76-67	203-188	1.6581	34-32	97-95	1.1201
Ireland	0.9649	11-7	26-20	1.5682	4-5	8-10	0.4308
Norway	9.8126	127-75	364-258	6.4855	35-10	130-80	4.3812
Spain	188.72	44-53	135-151	124.73	37-42	109-117	84.2599
Sweden	10.368	16-22	60-67	6.8513	156-183	440-490	4.5283
Switzerland	1.8007	74-67	208-199	1.1901	39-37	113-109	0.8040
Australia*	2.0531	9-21	43-63	1.3589	19-21	54-56	0.9166
Hong Kong	11.700	87-65	179-124	7.7328	2-12	15-35	5.2339
Malaysia	3.8756	0-0	0-0	2.5615	4-14	60-80	1.7304
New Zealand*	2.2750	22-37	87-112	1.5035	30-32	58-90	1.0157
Saudi Arabia	5.6745	0-0	0-0	3.7505	2-7	9-14	2.5336
Singapore	2.1505	0-0	0-0	1.4213	41-30	103-88	0.9601

OTHER SPOT RATES

Country	Sterling	Dollar	Country	Sterling	Dollar
Argentina	1.5133	0.9999	Nigeria	130.464	86.2000
Austria	15.7507	10.4102	Oman	0.5828	0.3851
Brazil	1.4782	0.9767	Pakistan	51.7856	34.2158
China	12.5867	8.3163	Philippines	39.6673	26.2050
Egypt	5.1486	3.4040	Portugal	232.056	153.375
Finland	6.8649	4.5358	Qatar	5.5070	3.6410
Ghana	2238.50	1480.00	Russia	7140.51	4721.00
Greece	369.884	244.390	South Africa	5.5250	3.6505
India	54.2032	35.8250	Taiwan	41.5456	27.4500
Kuwait	0.4541	0.3000	UAE	5.5566	3.6727

Note: Forward rates quoted high to low are at a discount (subtract from spot rate); those quoted low to high are at a premium (add to spot rate). *Dollar rates quoted as reciprocals. For the latest foreign exchange rates call 0891 123 3033. Calls cost 39p per minute (cheap rate) 49p other times.

Tourist Rates

£ Buys		£ Buys		£ Buys	
Australia(Dollars)	2.0000	France(Francs)	7.4000	New Zealand(Dollars)	2.2300
Austria(Schillings)	15.1500	Germany(Marks)	2.1650	Norway(Kroner)	9.8000
Belgium(Francs)	44.6000	Greece(Drachma)	366.0000	Portugal(Escudos)	226.0000
Canada(Dollars)	2.0100	Hong Kong(Dollars)	11.5000	Spain(Pesetas)	182.7500
Cyprus(Pounds)	0.6960	Ireland(Punts)	0.9500	Sweden(Kronor)	10.2300
Denmark(Kroner)	8.4400	Italy(Lira)	2360.0000	Switzerland(Francs)	1.7400
Holland(Guilders)	2.4500	Japan(Yen)	160.0000	Turkey(Lira)	88925.0000
Finland(Marks)	6.7900	Malta(Lira)	0.5375	United States(Dollars)	1.4775

Interest Rates

UK		Germany		US		Japan	
Base	6.25%	Discount	3.00%	Prime	8.75%	Discount	0.50%
France		Lombard	5.00%	Discount	5.25%	Belgium	
Intervention	5.80%	Canada		Fed Funds	5.44%	Discount	3.50%
Italy		Prime	7.75%	Spain		Central	3.55%
Discount	9.00%	Discount	5.73%	10-Day Repo	9.25%	Switzerland	
Netherlands		Denmark		Sweden		Discount	1.50%
Advances	3.30%	Discount	4.25%	Repo (Ave)	8.75%	Lombard	4.125%

Bond Yields

Country	5yr	yield %	10yr	yield %	Country	5yr	yield %	10yr	yield %
UK	8%	6.84	8¾%	7.30	Netherlands	5%	4.55	6½%**	5.81
US	5⅛%	5.32	5⅞%	5.60	Spain	10¼%	8.89	10.15%	9.33
Japan	6.4%	1.88	4.6%	3.14	Italy	10½%	3.56	10½%	10.21
Australia	8¾%	7.72	8¾%	8.08	Belgium	7¾%	5.04	6½%	6.25
Germany	5¼%	4.47	6%**	5.79	Sweden	11%	7.56	6%	8.24
France	8½%	5.35	7¼%	6.32	ECU OAT	8½%	5.57	7½%	6.67

Source: HSBC Markets Research. Yields calculated on local basis. ** Denotes new benchmark

Money Market Rates

	O'Night		7 Day		1 Month		3 Months		6 Months		1 Year	
Interbank	5¾	6⅛	[illegible]	[illegible]	[illegible]	[illegible]	[illegible]	[illegible]	6⅛	[illegible]	6	[illegible]
Sterling CDs	-		-		[illegible]		[illegible]		[illegible]		[illegible]	
Local Authority Deps	6⅜		[illegible]		[illegible]		[illegible]		[illegible]		[illegible]	
Discount Market Deps	6⅜		[illegible]		-		-		-		-	
Treasury Bills (Buy)	-		-		6⅛		[illegible]		-		-	
Dollar CDs	-		-		5.30		5.23		5.14		4.99	
ECU Linked Dep	-	-	-	-	[illegible]	[illegible]	[illegible]	[illegible]	[illegible]	[illegible]	[illegible]	[illegible]

Liffe Financial Futures

Contract		Settlement price	High for day	Low for day	EstConts traded	Open interest
Long Gilt	(Mar 96)	111-31	112-03	111-24	58135	146183
German Bond	(Mar 96)	101.18	101.20	100.92	195000	236482
J.G.Bond	(Mar 96)	119.39	119.42	119.29	3985	0
Italian Bond	(Mar 96)	112.41	112.89	111.85	69498	61504
3M Sterling	(Mar 96)	93.91	93.93	93.90	9218	91612
	(Jun 96)	94.15	94.17	94.14	15273	79453
3M Euro $	(Mar 96)	94.71			0	0
3M Euromark	(Mar 96)	96.72	96.72	96.69	22820	177692
	(Jun 96)	96.85	96.85	96.82	33762	172156
E.C.U.	(Mar 96)	95.40	95.43	95.34	2618	9072
	(Jun 96)	95.60	95.62	95.54	1297	4782
Euro SFr	(Mar 96)	98.30	98.32	98.26	8673	22585
FT-SE 100	(Mar 96)	3775.0	3778.0	3748.0	11743	65493
FT-SE 250	(Mar 96)	4100.0			0	3307
Eurolira	(Mar 96)	90.60	90.70	90.48	16720	48755

Liffe FT-SE Index Option

Settlement price: 3752.0 — closing offer price

Series	3700	3750	3800	3850	Call/Put Total/vols
February	84/17	50/31	25/59	11/87	--
March	109/37	77/55	51/79	31/112	--
April	125/61	95/80	71/106	49/135	--
May	142/74	111/93	87/120	64/148	--

Commodities

INDUSTRIAL METALS - London Metal Exchange

$/tonne		Cash	3 mths	Volume	LME Stocks		chg
Alu	HG	1550.5-51.5	1580-81	37212	647025	+	13675
Alu	Alloy	1360-70	1395-1400	1903	65040	+	1240
Copper	A	2560-65	2511-12	58610	346575	+	4125
Lead		734-36	727-28	6828	116525	-	3850
Nickel		8260-70	8355-60	13571	41544	-	246
Tin		6295-6305	6330-35	3284	11550	-	130
Zinc		1045.5-46.5	1067-68	20946	658600	-	
Settlement Conversion exchange rates		£/$ 1.5097	$/Dm 1.4861	$/¥ 106.78	Stock volumes & change in tonnes as at Tuesday 23 January		

PRECIOUS METALS

per 0z /oz	$	£	Coins	$	£		$	£
Platinum	417.85	276.65	Britannia	417	276	Krugrands	393/405	260/68
Palladium	136.25	130.00	Britannia.5 oz	207	137	Sovs	92/97	61/64
Silver spot	552.00	365.75	Britannia.25 oz	104	69	Nobles	411/26	272/82
Gold Bull	402.90	266.29	Britannia.10 oz	60	33	Maple Leaf	403/17	267/76

Source: Sharps & Son

AGRICULTURAL

Cocoa LCE	£/tonne	Coffee LCE	$/tonne	Barley LCE	£/tonne	Potatoes LCE	£/tonne	Potatoes ATA	Gld/100kg
Mar	911	Jan	1928	Jan	114.10	Mar	200.00	Apr	27.1
May	934	Mar	1906	Mar	115.90	Apr	182.80	May	28.0
July	957	May	1734	May	107.00	May	210.00	Jun	28.7
Vol:	6,238	Vol:	6,984	Vol:	65	Vol:	90	Vol:	216

White Sugar LCE	$/tonne	Raw Sugar LCE	c/lbs	Freight LCE	$10/index pt	Wheat LCE	£/tonne	Corn CBOT	1230 Prices Cents/bushel	
Mar	366.50	Mar	10.30	Jan	1510	Jan	132.35		Hi-Lo	Sett
May	347.30	May	11.36	Feb	1450	Mar	124.40	Mar	361.75-358.50	359.75
Aug	332.30	July	11.36	Vol	371	May	126.40	May	364.50-361.75	362.75
Vol:	752	Vol:	0	Index	1332	Vol:	417	Jul	359.75-358.50	358.00

Source: CMS

Other Softs (Agricultural)

Jan	Maize (No.3)**	$/tonne	150.5	Feb	Soya Oil§	FL/100kg	89.0
Feb/Mar	Copra (†)	$/tonne	167.0	Feb/Mar	Coconut Oil (†)	$/tonne	740.0
Mar	Cotton (NY)	UScent/lb	86.60	Feb/Apr	Sunflower Oil§	$/tonne	595.0
Feb	Wool	Acent/kg	690.0	Feb	Rapeseed Oil§	FL/100kg	88.0
Feb	Rubber*	Mcent/kg	387.5	Jan/Feb	Groundnut Oil	$/tonne	945.0

Origin: §Dutch/EC - any origin - †Philippines/Indonesia *Malaysia **N Europe Source: FT Information/Reuters

ENERGY

Brent Crude IPE	5.30pm	($/barrel) *chg	Yr ago	Gasoil IPE	close	($/tonne) *chg	WTI	Products 1 6pm	Spot CiF North West Europe	($/tonne)
Mar	17.00	+0.11	16.67	Feb	156.50	-0.50	Mar	18.25	Leaded Gasoline	164/167
Apr	16.58	+0.09	16.55	Mar	153.50	+0.00	Apr	17.65	Naphtha	168/170
May	16.35	+0.09	16.51	Apr	151.75	+0.25	May	17.65	EC Gasoil	160/162
Vol: 26,576		Index:	16.88	Vol:	14,256		June	17.50	Heavy Fuel Oil	94/96

*since 5.30pm previous day. Year ago prices show average for week. Source: ICIS-London Oil Reports. †New prices

COMMODITY INDICES

*GSCI Indices	Base date	+Spot	%Day Chg	Dec 31st	%Yr to d chg	Year ago	% Yr chg
Index	1970=100	187.45	+0.90	203.50	-7.09	177.27	+5.74
Agricultural	1970=100	278.23	+1.18	281.75	-0.90	242.71	+15.05
Energy	1983=100	82.17	+0.82	71.31	-12.82	66.34	-10.36
Industl Metals	1977=100	183.47	+1.91	193.32	-5.09	231.8	-20.84
Livestock	1970=100	175.03	+0.05	182.71	-4.20	188.25	-7.02
Precious Metals	1973=100	514.66	-0.02	489.86	+5.06	485.89	+5.90

Source: Goldman, Sachs & Co. *GSCI is a trademark and servicemark of Goldman, Sachs & Co. †Close as of 23 Jan '96

100 Largest Insurance Funds

Stock	Bid	Mid	Offer	Stock	Bid	Mid	Offer
Abbey Life Managed S4	7447		7839	London Life Mixed		692.20	
Abbey National Managed	1330		1400	M&G Managed Bond	9721		1023
AEtna Life 82 Managed	35108		36956	M&G Managed Income Bond Ser A	1145		1203
AEtna Life Bull	2039		2146	Merchant Inv Managed	5408		5692
AEtna Life Pre-82 3 Way	985.72			MGM Managed	3849		4052
Albany Multiple Investments	11474		12077	N&P Managed	1683		1751
Allied Dunbar Managed	12356		13007	NatWest Growth Managed	1226		1295
AXA E&L Balanced S5	8074		8488	NFU Mutual Mixed	1811		1848
AXA E&L Dist S6	1060		1115	Norwich Union	1173		1234
Barclays Barclaybond	7202		7582	Norwich Union	15331		17801
Barclays Managed	5919		6231	Norwich Union Managed Life	16280		17136
Black Horse Inc Ser2	85103		89582	NPI Managed	5521		5884
Black Horse Managed Inv S2	54436		57301	Pearl Managed Gross	9589		10105
Britannia	3881		4086	Pearl Mixed Fund	1795		1890
Clerical Med Fd Sapphire	3264		3436	Provident Mutual Managed	5400		5684
CLSB Managed	3745		3943	Prudential Ass Prufund Managed	3933		4092
CLUK Managed S1&S2	8047		8470	Prudential IL Managed S2	9188		9672
Colonial Mutual Managed	43814		46120	Refuge Managed S1	4699		4947
Confederation Managed S4	12355		13000	Reliance Managed	4658		4903
Cornhill Managed A	10375		10925	Royal Nat Op Income Dis	2469		2606
Crown Managed	8436		8774	Royal Life Managed	4358		4587
CU Prime Managed	4512		4750	Royal Scottish Growth Managed	1870		1969
Eagle Star Equity Managed	2705		2848	Save & Prosper Balanced Invest	8521		9017
Eagle Star Managed	2705		2848	Scottish Amicable Managed	5284		5573
FP Managed	7687		8091	Scottish Equitable Mixed	2916		3072
FP/CCM Vanguard Managed	8457		8902	Scottish Life Managed	3262		3435
Friends Prov Managed	3441		3623	Scottish Mutual Growth	2638		2777
GA Managed	3367		3544	Scottish Prov Ass Bal Gth Mgd	6060		6639
Gan Fidelity	2472		2603	Scottish Prov Inst Managed	3061		3213
Gan Foreign & Colonial	1880		1980	Scottish Widows Mixed	5158		5432
Gan Managed	3437		3619	Skandia Balanced Managed	4321		4548
Gen Mut Sel S1	3435		3584	Skandia Fid Managed	2382		2507
Gan Perpetual	2686		2827	Skandia Per Managed	2603		2739
GRE LLA Managed	7606		8007	Standard Equity	1911		22589
Hambro Assured Managed	1888		1987	Standard Life Managed	8085		8510
Hill Samuel Managed A	6156		6645	Sun Alliance Managed	7697		8103
Hill Samuel/Target Managed	6881		7244	Sun Alliance PG Investment A		3940	
Hill Samuel/Target Mgd Growth	2202		2318	Sun Alliance Ph Wealth Assure	7703		8109
Irish Life Global Managed S3	8443		8883	Sun Life Managed	10098		10628
J Rothschild M&G Managed	1596		1681	Sun Life/Can Managed	4351		4580
J Rothschild Scot Amic Managed	1480		1569	Teachers Managed	3882		4082
J Rothschild St James Managed	1729		1821	TSB Homebuyer	2588		2725
Laurentian Managed S3	6039		6356	TSB Managed	3233		3404
Legal & Gen Managed S2	9293		9789	United Friendly Managed	2870		30221
Liberty Managed	5545		5456	Wesleyan Managed	3918		4151
Liberty Select Security A	5847		6156	Windsor Gresham Managed S3	7868		8312
Lincoln Intl Anglian	579		608	Windsor Investor Units	3721		3916
Lincoln Nil Managed 3	5157		5428	Windsor Kiwi Key Managed	7814		8189
Lincoln Nil Managed 4	2591		2727	Winterthur Life Fund Mixed	15108		15893
Lincoln Nil Schroders S2	4384		4615	Woolwich Life Managed		1820	

UNIT TRUST GUIDE

d	ex dividend
e	exit charge when units sold
buy	formerly 'offer'
sell	formerly 'bid'
x	Non SIB recognised funds

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Man takes the Cheltenham challenge

Racing

GREG WOOD

One Man may be the 11-8 favourite for the Gold Cup in March after his commanding success in the King George, but for serious backers there is still a disturbing hole in his form which makes support at such short odds hard to justify. The grey has appeared at Cheltenham only twice, and on both occasions he has been deeply disappointing. In two days' time, however, he will get the chance to make it third-time lucky.

Gordon Richards, One Man's trainer, yesterday confirmed that his chaser will line up for Saturday's Piller Properties Investment Chase at the headquarters of National Hunt. He reported that One Man worked extremely well on Tuesday, and confirmed his place in the weekend's big race when he exercised "satisfactorily" yesterday morning. "I have not told Mr Hales [One Man's owner] yet, but I am going to run him on Saturday," Richards said.

The Gold Cup favourite is expected to face just four rivals, since the predicted good ground will rule out Monsieur Le Cure, and Aidan O'Brien will run Life Of The Lord at Leopardstown a week later. It should still be a race of real quality, however, as Flashing Steel, Barton Bank, Young Hustler and Willsford attempt to puncture the euphoria which now surrounds One Man's every appearance.

The grey's previous visits to Prestbury Park were for a novice hurdle in 1992, and then the Sun Alliance Chase at the Festival, for which he started favourite, in 1994. He was soundly beaten in both races. Richards, though, sees no reason why One Man should not produce his best form on Saturday. "The course will not be a problem," he said. "I would not have entered him for the Gold Cup if I didn't think he could go round it."

RICHARD EDMONDSON
NAP: Sunley Bay
(Wincanton 3.00)
NB: Lets Rumble
(Wincanton 2.00)

When asked to nominate the most serious danger to One Man on Saturday, Richards picked Flashing Steel, who is dependable but surely not in the same class as the King George winner. This is a telling reflection on the decline of Barton Bank, who won the 1993 King George and was among the favourites for last year's Gold Cup, but now appears unable to recapture his best form.

Like One Man, Barton Bank has not found Cheltenham welcoming, even when he was performing well. His task on Saturday will not be aided by his introduction to a new jockey, following Adrian Maguire's injury at Leicester two days ago.

David Nicholson, Barton Bank's trainer, had not decided yesterday who would replace Maguire but was cheered by news that his jockey may return in three weeks rather than six weeks as was first feared.

Maguire's agent, Dave Roberts, said: "Adrian has seen a specialist and the injuries are not as serious as first thought. It was thought he had cruciate-ligament damage, but it is not those ligaments that are injured. He should be out for no more than three weeks and could be back for the Tote Gold Trophy."

The build-up to the season's main events continued yesterday with the release of entries both for the Singer & Friedlander National Trial at Uttoxeter on 10 February, and the Grand National itself on 30 March. Miinnehoma, the 1994 National winner, heads the list for Uttoxeter's race, with Lord Relic, owned by Stan Clarke, the track's chairman, another interesting candidate. Top class at his best, Lord Relic has not raced since sustaining an injury in the 1994 Welsh National.

Lord Relic is also one of 82 entries for Aintree, along with Carvill's Hill, another convalescent in Martin Pipe's yard, and Royal Athlete, last year's winner, who has not seen a racecourse since.

"He is fine," Mark Pitman, assistant to Royal Athlete's trainer, Jenny, said yesterday. "We are building his whole year around Aintree. He is coming along steadily and he will have one or two runs before Liverpool. We are taking care and won't rush him."

Of the nine horses who followed Royal Athlete home last April, only two, Dubacilla and Romany King, both now retired, are not among this year's initial entry. Bookmakers, no doubt desperate to boost turnover in another double-rollover week for the Lottery, will offer you 20-1 the field, but since even the official handicapper is not yet sure of the final weights, this is a very rare occasion when Camelot offers better value than the local betting shop.

Nicholson: jockey short

Grand National (Aintree, 30 March).
William Hill: 20-1 Flashing Steel, Master Oats, Monsieur Le Cure, Royal Mountbrowne, Superior Finish, Young Hustler, 25-1 Deep Bramble, Earth Summit, Lusty Light, McGregor The Third, Rough Quest, Royal Athlete, Smith's Band, Val D'Alene, 33-1 others.
Ladbrokes: 16-1 Dublin Flyer, Jodami, Young Hustler, 20-1 Master Oats, Superior Finish, Smith's Band, 25-1 Lusty Light, Deep Bramble, Lo Stregone, Earth Summit, Rough Quest, 33-1 others.
Tote: 14-1 Young Hustler, 16-1 Dublin Flyer, Superior Finish, 20-1 Deep Bramble, Jodami, Lo Stregone, Master Oats, Monsieur Le Cure, 25-1 others.

King George rises as Arc support is withdrawn

Europe's two top middle-distance races for horses of all ages, the King George VI and Queen Elizabeth Stakes and the Prix de l'Arc de Triomphe, have had contrasting fortunes with sponsors this week. The Longchamp race will be in need of a new sponsor next year because of Granada's takeover of Forte, who have backed the race for the last two years. Granada are obliged to continue the sponsorship of this year's race, but will not continue thereafter.

De Beers, sponsors of the King George for 25 years, have increased their backing of the Ascot race by £20,000 to £360,000. The additional support of the racecourse will ensure that it joins the Derby in a club of two as British races with £1/2m in prize-money.

WINCANTON

HYPERION
1.30 Zingibar 2.00 Samlee 2.30 Morstock 3.00 Sunley Bay 3.30 Northern Saddler (nb) 4.00 Carrig Dancer

GOING: Chases – Good to Soft; Hurdles – Soft.
■ Right-hand, galloping course. Run-in of 200yd.
■ Course is NE of town on B3081. Templecombe railway station 4m. **ADMISSION:** Members £12.50 (Junior Members, 17 to 22 years, £6.50), Tattersalls £8; Course (and cars to course) £4. (Under-16s free into all enclosures). **CAR PARK:** Free.

SIS | RACING CHANNEL

■ **LEADING TRAINERS WITH RUNNERS: M Pipe** — 35 winners from 129 runners gives a success ratio of 27.1% and a profit to a £1 level stake of £19.63; **Mrs J Pitman** — 22 winners, 75 runners, 29.3%, +£07.77; **J Gifford** — 16 winners, 90 runners, 16.7%, -£43.04; **P Hobbs** — 15 winners, 111 runners, 13.5%, -£8.75.
■ **LEADING JOCKEYS: R Dunwoody** — 31 winners, 146 rides, 21.2%, -£51.55; **J Osborne** — 11 winners, 63 rides, 17.5%, -£17.12; **C Llewellyn** — 11 winners, 60 rides, 15.9%, +£3.55; **M A Fitzgerald** — 11 winners, 116 rides, 9.0%, -£60.00.
WINNERS IN THE LAST SEVEN DAYS: None.
LONG-DISTANCE RUNNERS: Teinein (2.30), **Rectory Garden** (3.00) & **Silver Standard** (4.00) have been sent 109 miles by T Forster from Ludlow, Shropshire.

1.30 ELITE RACING CLUB JUVENILE NOVICE CLAIMING HURDLE (CLASS F) £3,000 added 4YO 2m Penalty Value £2,355

1 35200 AL CORNICHE (21) (BF) (D Bass) K Cunningham-Brown 11 7 ....M A Fitzgerald
2 003 DISSOLVE (14) (Western Solvents Ltd) N Lampard 11 7 ....D Walsh (5)
3 3525 HANDSON (7) (Burrow Racing) B R Millman 11 4 ....D Salter (5)
4 4 TOUTE BAGAILLE (FR) (20) (Knight Hawks Partnership) M Pipe 11 3 ....D Bridgwater
5 055 KETCHICAN (7) (Terry Neill) S Knight 11 0 ....S Burrough
6 04663 ZINGIBAR (8) (BF) (T Holpin) J M Bradley 11 0 ....A P McCoy
7 P5P00 HUSH CROSS (7) (P J Wightman) S Knight 10 13 ....G Upton
8 02602 MAGICAL BID (7) (Gwilym Fry) J M Bradley 10 10 ....R Farrant
9 0 SMILEY FACE (7) (J W Mursell) R Hodges 10 10 ....T Dascombe (5)
10 3 ANNA BANNANNA (180) (406200 Racing) M Pipe 10 9 ....J Lower
11 FP PACIFIC OVERTURE (48) (C R Barwell) C R Barwell 10 5 ....B Clifford
- 11 declared -

BETTING: 9-4 Toute Bagaille, 3-1 Zingibar, 5-1 Anna Bannanna, 11-2 Dissolve, 7-1 Handson, Magical Bid, 10-1 Ketchican, 12-1 others
1995: Mint A Million 4 11 2 D Gallagher 5-1 (M Blanshard) 9 ran

FORM GUIDE
These are moderate horses and the race is not worth getting too involved in. There are also a number of possibilities, one of the most likely being that the former French filly **TOUTE BAGAILLE** will improve on her fourth behind Danbys Gorse in testing conditions at Towcester earlier in the month. She is having her sights lowered and should hurdle more fluently on this better ground. **Zingibar**, though staying on again, never looked like justifying favouritism when dropped into a seller and only third behind Amber Valley at Nottingham last week. It is possible being fitted with a visor might make a big difference. He is also up against less experienced horses, so he could be good for at least a place. **Magical Bid** may have been a bit flattered to run Pridewood Picker as close he did at Ludlow at Ludlow last Thursday. The winner didn't find as much as expected after travelling easily throughout, but that was still a good performance from Magical Bid and he is quite likely to be thereabouts again. **Al Corniche** has struggled since running Much Too High to four lengths at Fontwell in November, including when joint-favourite for a novice handicap over a longer trip at Nottingham last time. The Fontwell run gives him a chance, while **Dissolve's** improved third to Robins Pride at the last meeting means he can also be considered. **Selection:** TOUTE BAGAILLE

2.00 MAURICE LISTER MAIDEN CHASE (CLASS E) £5,000 added 3m 1f 110yds Penalty Value £3,912

1 34-PP6F BORO HILL (21) (Roger Alsop) R Alsop 7 11 5 ....Mr M Rimell
2 24-030P DECISIVE SPICE (8) (H Wellstead) R Alner 7 11 5 ....W McFarland
3 P0-52U5 DUKE OF LANCASTER (21) (Hunt Allen Partnership) Mrs J Pitman 7 11 5 ....R Farrant
4 0-PF FATHER TIM (7) (Lee Bowles) J M Bradley 6 11 5 ....W J Ryan (7)
5 3UP0P FREDS MELODY (14) (F G Tucker) F Tucker 11 11 5 ....G Upton
6 4600-5U GOD SPEED YOU (12) (Wallop) C Nash 7 11 5 ....J F Titley
7 2OF GRAPHIC DESIGNER (10) (GPS (Prim) Ltd) G Harwood 7 11 5 ....B Powell
8 60-0400 JIMMY'S FANCY (24) (S A Jones) Mrs S Williams 8 11 5 ....A Tory
9 00/24 LETS RUMBLE (35) (H V Perry) R Alner 7 11 5 ....Mr P Henley (5)
10 MY MAIN MAN (Mrs S Messer-Bennetts) Mrs S Messer-Bennetts 8 11 5 ....Mr J Culloty (7)
11 .P/PP6/ PHILIPPONNAT (USA) (691) (S A Douch) S Douch 10 11 5 ....Mr J Jukes
12 2-64 PRICE'S HILL (21) (G D W Swire) K Bailey 9 11 5 ....T J Murphy (3)
13 P2-22F2 SAMLEE (19) (S Martin) P Hobbs 7 11 5 ....A P McCoy
14 P6P0P-6 TEARFUL PRINCE (49) (C W Mitchell) C Mitchell 12 11 5 ....S Burrough
15 THE LANCER (A E Frost) D Gandolfo 7 11 5 ....D Fortt (5)
16 KINGSMILL QUAY (Miss J du Plessis) Miss J du Plessis 7 11 0 ....B Fenton (5)
- 16 declared -

BETTING: 7-2 Lets Rumble, 4-1 My Main Man, 9-2 Price's Hill, 6-1 Samlee, 8-1 Duke Of Lancaster, 16-1 Kingsmill Quay, Graphic Designer, 20-1 others
1995: Esscoubleyou 7 11 5 R Greene 4-1 (Mrs J Renfree-Barons) 19 ran

FORM GUIDE
If you ignore the Lingfield run five weeks ago of former point-to-pointer **LETS RUMBLE** – which is probably wise considering the state of the ground that day – then he has a very good chance of opening his account under Rules. Apart from winning between the flags last season, he also ran second to the smart See More Business and showed plenty of promise when splitting Ubu Val (impressive winner at Folkestone yesterday) and subsequent scorer Church Law in a strongly-run novice chase at Windsor in November. **My Main Man** has won his last four starts between the flags but has had nearly a year off since his only start last season. It remains to be seen whether he can bridge the gap between point-to-pointer and novice chaser. **Samlee** has fared fairly well over hurdles since his one try in a point-to-point in 1994. He comes here in good form after running What's Your Story to two lengths in a Haydock stayers hurdle last time out and has every chance if he takes to fences at the first time of asking. The only possible thing against him is that he has looked a tricky ride on occasions. **Graphic Designer** made a promising start over hurdles at Ascot. He looks the part for chasing, though so far he hasn't had much luck, being hampered at Folkestone and then falling at Fontwell. **Duke Of Lancaster's** jumping has let him down since being second to The Bud Club in a slowly-run novice chase at Uttoxeter and **Price's Hill** should have a better chance. He won a point-to-point in Ireland in 1994 and has shaped like a real stayer in his three runs over here. **The Lancer** also won an Irish point-to-point two years ago.
Selection: LETS RUMBLE

2.30 TOTE BETTING SHOP HANDICAP HURDLE (CLASS D) £4,000 added 2m Penalty Value £2,863

1 120-500 AMANCIO (USA) (12) (D) (Paul H Locke) G Harwood 5 12 0 ....M A Fitzgerald
2 232000 TEEN JAY (7) (D) (Gemini Associates) R Stronge 6 12 0 ....R Stronge
3 FP34-40 CABOCHON (24) (D) (Jack Joseph) R Frost 9 11 12 ....J Frost
4 255-006 STATAJACK (43) (CD) (Mrs M E Slade) D Elsworth 8 11 9 ....A Procter (3)
5 534-411 TEINEIN (FR) (8) (D) (Simon Sainsbury) T Forster 5 11 9 (6ex) ....A P McCoy
6 5530-F0 SMUGGLER'S POINT (USA) (10) (D) (Martin Hickey) R O'Sullivan 6 11 6 ....B Powell
7 350240 KEEP ME IN MIND (12) (CD) (P C Tory) N R Mitchell 7 11 6 ....D Skyrme
8 46-2230 MORSTOCK (12) (CD) (Mrs M Fairbairn) R Hodges 6 11 6 ....T Dascombe (5)
9 3112-04 PETITJEAN (63) (D) (Rhys Thomas Williams) D Burchell 5 11 0 ....D J Burchell
- 9 declared -

BETTING: 11-8 Teinein, 4-1 Statajack, 5-1 Morstock, 8-1 Amancio, 8-1 Keep Me In Mind, 10-1 Petitjean, 12-1 Teen Jay, 16-1 others
1995: The Caumrue 7 10 12 A P McCoy 5-1 (G Balding) 11 ran

FORM GUIDE
TEINEIN is improving fast and looks ahead of the handicapper. For a few strides he looked in trouble as Saint Ciel mounted a challenge from the third last at Nottingham last week, but Tony McCoy didn't have to get remotely serious for Teinein to draw away again on the run-in. He won with more in hand than the 6lb penalty he has here. **Amancio**, **Cabochon** and **Teen Jay** are all struggling at present and **Morstock** is the most likely danger. He was the only one to make any sort of a race of it with Cheryl's Lad at Cheltenham in December and then rather spoilt his own chance by helping to set too strong a pace against Most Equal at Warwick. This isn't as competitive as his latest run at Ascot. **Keep Me In Mind** was also in that Ascot race. Previous form with Sohrab at Exeter suggested he might have done better, but two of his three wins have been over this course and his earlier head defeat by Bookcase at Exeter gives him some hope. He holds **Statajack** on that run. **Smuggler's Point** has run prominently in his two outings this season and seems to be coming to hand. He is not a bad horse on his day.
Selection: TEINEIN

3.00 PAT RUTHVEN & GUY NIXON MEMORIAL H'CAP CHASE (AMATEURS) (CLASS E) £5,000 3m 1f 110yds Pen Value £3,730

1 34422F SUNLEY BAY (7) (CD) (BF) (Mrs M G Barber) P Nicholls 10 12 0 ....Miss P Curling (5)
2 FP-405P GIVUS A BUCK (14) (C) (D) (K Costello) D Elsworth 13 11 9 ....Mr R Nuttall (7)
3 3/F45P/ POLAR REGION (T30) (C Marner) N Henderson 10 11 8 ....Mr C Vigors (7)
4 40-4224 SOME DAY SOON (19) (K Powell) M Bradstock 11 11 4 ....Mr R Burton (7)
5 3BP0-P6 BEAU BABILLARD (19) (Mrs C I A Paterson) P Nicholls 9 11 4 ....Mr J Culloty (7)
6 2211-23 RECTORY GARDEN (14) (Lord Cadogan) T Forster 7 11 4 ....Mr R Thornton (7)
7 F31F-15 FULL OF FIRE (20) (J Michael Gillow) K Bailey 9 11 1 ....Mr C Bonner (3)
8 .13FF- STAR OATS (283) (D) (Western Solvents Ltd) N Lampard 10 10 11 ....Mr F Brennan (7)
9 65P5-24 SILVERINO (14) (S N Burfield) S Earle 10 10 9 ....Mr M Rimell (5)
10 230-31P GOOD INSIGHT (45) (Terry Neill) C Brooks 8 10 6 ....Mr E James (7)
11 111-U00 GLEN MIRAGE (12) (J Coombe) M Coombe 11 10 2 ....Miss M Coombe (7)
12 0PP1PF CAVALERO (7) (H J Manners) H Manners 7 10 0 ....Mr A Wintle (7)
13 P61-P55 BLAKE'S WONDER (24) (The Sextet Partnership) R Alner 6 10 0 ....Mr P Henley (5)
- 13 declared -

Minimum weight: 10st. True handicap weights: Cavalero 9st 12lb, Blake's Wonder 9st 2lb.
BETTING: 3-1 Sunley Bay, 7-2 Rectory Garden, 6-1 Full Of Fire, 13-2 Good Insight, 7-1 Silverino, 12-1 Givus A Buck, Some Day Soon, 14-1 others
1995: Sunley Bay 9 10 13 Miss P Curling 11-4 (P Nicholls) 12 ran

FORM GUIDE
Ed James's claim on **GOOD INSIGHT** could prove invaluable, even though there is a possibility of a pound or so overweight. The partnership take on course specialist **Sunley Bay** and Polly Curling. These two won the race last year and Sunley Bay was unlucky on his last visit when closing the gap all the way to the line with Norman Conqueror after being hampered and losing ground seven fences from home. **Rectory Garden** was a dozen lengths back in third, **Silverino** a further two and a half lengths away fourth, while old **Givus A Buck** was pulled up. Rectory Garden hadn't been out since October and that may have been the reason he didn't get home rather than lack of stamina. Even so, he and Silverino, who ideally wants it a lot more testing, will have their work cut out if they are to reverse the form but the novice Good Insight is no forlorn hope at the weights. It is only this season that Good Insight has had his attention turned to chasing and he soon stepped up on a promising third behind Rocco and Court Melody at Worcester by winning at Bangor, where Rocco was held in second when departing at the final fence. That marked him down as an improving young chaser and, although his only subsequent run was a bit disappointing behind Court Melody in the mud at Newton Abbot, the ground may have been too testing that day. **Full Of Fire** started the season with a good win at Ludlow and his fifth behind Turning Trix at Towcester was a better run that it looked. His jumping has improved and he has definite place prospects. **Selection:** GOOD INSIGHT

3.30 TERENCE BRADY & CHARLOTTE BINGHAM LIMITED HANDICAP CHASE (CLASS C) £10,000 2m Penalty Value £6,710

1 1-11111 EASTHORPE (19) (D) (Martin Broughton) Miss H Knight 8 11 7 ....J F Titley
2 1360-2F BARNA BOY (6) (Lynn Wilson) N Henderson 8 11 4 ....M A Fitzgerald
3 35-1131 NORTHERN SADDLER (13) (D) (Richard J Evans) R Hodges 9 10 12 ....T Dascombe (5)
4 22211-3 MISTER ODDY (13) (D) (Mrs R M Hill) J King 10 10 7 ....Mr J Culloty (7)
- 4 declared -

Minimum weight: 10st 7lb. True handicap weight: Mister Oddy 10st 1lb.
BETTING: evens Easthorpe, 9-4 Northern Saddler, 11-4 Barna Boy, 6-1 Mister Oddy
1995: Medinas Swan Song 7 10 7 A Tory 3-1 (R Hodges) 6 ran

FORM GUIDE
EASTHORPE's remarkable run reached six on the spin when he held Storm Alert at Sandown 19 days ago. That was probably his best performance yet and there is every chance of the spree continuing in this limited handicap. **Barna Boy's** connections will be hoping this is third-time lucky, because blunders at the last two fences he has jumped have proved costly. This former smart hurdler's jumping deteriorated after he had made a winning start to his chasing career and his blunder at the final fence at Worcester in November let in **Northern Saddler** for success. Having failed to get beyond the first at Kempton on Friday, Barna Boy's confidence could still be fragile and Northern Saddler is the safer option. This game and genuine performer got the better of Zajira and old rival **Mister Oddy** at Ascot last time. **Selection:** EASTHORPE

4.00 POTTERS HANDICAP HURDLE (CLASS F) £3,000 added 2m 6f Penalty Value £2,478

1 350-50P LANSDOWNE (64) (D) (R F Denmead) P Nicholls 8 12 0 ....M Griffiths (7)
2 53-032F ROYAL PIPER (NZ) (6) (CD) (A M Darlington) A J Wilson 9 11 11 ....A Tory
3 P22-1F0 SILVER STANDARD (54) (D) (G W Lugg) T Forster 6 11 9 ....G McCourt
4 33P010- LANDSKER PRYDE (306) (CD) (Mrs J K L Watts) M Pipe 7 11 8 ....D Bridgwater
5 52/93P1- ACE PLAYER (NZ) (243) (R P B Michaelson) D Chappell 8 11 2 ....R Greene
6 600/06-2 CARRIG DANCER (14) (W G R Fearon) S Sherwood 8 10 12 ....A P McCoy
7 130/1-50 QUIET DAWN (37) (D) (Mrs P M King) J King 10 10 11 ....G Upton
8 5P0/P-55 SUKAAB (7) (C) (B J M Ryall) B Ryall 11 10 10 ....M A Fitzgerald
9 3-3443 FOXTROT ROMEO (12) (Lady Cobham) C Brooks 6 10 9 ....Mr E James
10 323/65 YOUNG TESS (22) (Geo Taylor) N Babbage 6 10 3 ....W McFarland
11 /PU12/4- THANKS A MILLION (514) (R N Short) N Thomson 10 10 2 ....R Davis
12 320-243 MR PLAYFULL (14) (P A Tylor) R Frost 6 10 0 ....J Frost
13 135-225 DUNLIR (44) (B R Brereton) P Rodford 6 10 0 ....S Burrough
14 5-05432 PERSISTENT GUNNER (8) (C) (P Slade) R Hodges 6 10 0 ....T Dascombe (5)
15 3P0/0-S0 MAYFIELD PARK (7) (D) (C R Barwell) C R Barwell 11 10 0 ....B Clifford
16 3/0P0 BILLY BARTER (20) (The Cornish Connection) G Balding 6 10 0 ....B Fenton (5)
17 3FP5F0- COEUR BATTANT (FR) (245) (B P Jones) R Baker 6 10 0 ....B Powell
- 17 declared -

Minimum weight: 10st. True handicap weights: Dunlir 9st 13lb, Persistent Gunner 9st 12lb, Mayfield Park 9st 12lb, Billy Barter 9st 10lb, Coeur Battant 9st.
BETTING: 5-1 Carrig Dancer, 7-1 Landsker Pryde, 8-1 Foxtrot Romeo, Mr Playfull, 10-1 Ace Player, Royal Piper, Persistent Gunner, 12-1 others
1995: Royal Piper 8 10 11 A Tory 16-1 (Mrs J Renfree-Barons) 18 ran

FORM GUIDE
Lansdowne, who is struggling at present, has had a change of stables. It may make a difference, though one of the few showing improvement is the novice **FOXTROT ROMEO**, keeping on in third behind Sparkling Yasmin over a furlong and a half less at Warwick last time. The extra distance should help and he is on a fair weight for his first handicap. Although **Royal Piper** has a stone more to shoulder than when successful in this race last year, he is in better form than 12 months ago and the opposition isn't quite as strong. A promising third to Karar at Chepstow in November was followed by him being touched off by Tour Leader at Taunton, so it would be no surprise if he won again. **Landsker Pryde's** sole success was in a mares' event over the course and distance on soft ground last February. She has raced only once since then, however, and will need to run up to that form. The ground was riding fast when **Silver Standard** won over this trip at Stratford in October – Royal Piper back in seventh on his first race of the season – but he also has winning form on this easier surface. Three miles in testing conditions at Towcester last time was probably stretching his stamina and he is not without a chance here. **Sukaab** kept plugging away and was beginning to make ground at the finish over two and a half furlongs less at Taunton last Thursday. The grey was quite smart in his day and capable of running into a place. Best longshot could be **Billy Barter**, who made much more of a show at Towcester last time and may do better getting weight in a handicap. **Selection:** FOXTROT ROMEO

HUNTINGDON

HYPERION
12.50 Tim 1.20 Music Master 1.50 Hawaiian Sam 2.20 Whispering Court 2.50 Act The Wag 3.20 PETTAUGH (nap) 3.50 Eez-Away 4.20 The Toiseach

GOING: Good to Soft (Soft in places).
■ Right-hand, level course. Run-in 200yds.
■ Racecourse is at junction of A1 and A604. Huntingdon railway station (service from London, King's Cross) is 1 mile away. **ADMISSION:** Members £12; Tattersalls £8; Course £4. **CAR PARK:** Free.

SIS | RACING CHANNEL

WINNERS IN THE LAST SEVEN DAYS: None.
LONG-DISTANCE RUNNERS: Johns The Boy (3.20) has been sent 210 miles by N Mason from Crook, Co Durham; **Grand Cru** (12.50) & **Erzadjan** (3.20) have been sent 186 miles by Mrs M Reveley from Lingdale, Cleveland.

12.50 OFFORD NOVICE HURDLE (CLASS E) (DIV I) £3,200 added 2m 110yds

1 12143 TIM (20) (CD) J Jenkins 6 11 12 ....J Railton
2 00- ALLEXTON LAD (326) R Spicer 5 11 5 ....E Husband (3)
3 0/PP DIXTON HILL (8) R Dickin 8 11 5 ....Doubtful
4 6P/0 FRANK KNOWS (40) T George 6 11 5 ....R Johnson (3)
5 30 GRAND CRU (58) (BF) Mrs M Reveley 5 11 5 ....G Lee (3)
6 40-0 LETS BE FRANK (71) C Egerton 5 11 5 ....P Holley
7 36 MY CHEEKY MAN (20) D Nicholson 5 11 5 ....W Marston
8 3- POINTED REMARK (258) N Henderson 5 11 5 ....J R Kavanagh
9 0/P3300- SABBAQ (353) Mrs S Lamyman 6 11 5 ....J McLaughlin
10 0-P00 SHANNON LAD (40) A Carroll 6 11 5 ....D Morris
11 0 SILAS LEAT (75) J M Jefferson 6 11 5 ....M Dwyer
12 THE PALADIN A Turnell 6 11 5 ....S McNeill
13 0-1P WILDE MUSIC (75) C Brooks 6 11 5 ....D Gallagher
14 000-0 BEL PROMISE (19) P Webber 7 11 0 ....R Bellamy
15 00- LANOTA (257) C Jones 6 11 0 ....J Meredith
16 4 MENELAVE (36) O Sherwood 6 11 0 ....J Osborne
17 00-0 RIO DANCER (14) H Oliver 7 11 0 ....Doubtful
- 17 declared -

BETTING: 7-2 Menelave, 6-1 Tim, My Cheeky Man, 7-1 Pointed Remark, 8-1 The Paladin, Grand Cru, 10-1 Wilde Music, 16-1 others

1.20 OFFORD NOVICE HURDLE (CLASS E) (DIV II) £3,200 added 2m 110yds

1 62-P136 WREN WARBLER (20) (D) Mrs P Robeson 6 11 7 ....M Richards
2 0-0 DANCING RANGER (59) Miss S Wilton 5 11 5 ....Gary Lyons
3 FRED JEFFREY A Turnell 5 11 5 ....S McNeill
4 200 GENERAL JACKIE (14) J Gifford 6 11 5 ....P Hide
5 1 GRACEFIELD (79) N Chance 6 11 5 ....R Johnson (3)
6 ILSLEY STAR R Stronge 6 11 5 ....Mr J Rees
7 0 KUMARI KING (54) A Carroll 6 11 5 ....D Morris
8 P0- LOCH GARMAN (378) F Murphy 6 11 5 ....P Carberry
9 MUSIC MASTER C Egerton 6 11 5 ....J Osborne
10 0 SHALIK (54) O Brennan 6 11 5 ....S O'Donnell (7)
11 00/0 SILVER SUMAL (14) H Oliver 7 11 5 ....Jacqui Oliver
12 0/0 WOODYOU (59) F Jordan 6 11 5 ....J Lodder
13 0 COOL MANDY (36) R Price 5 11 0 ....P McLoughlin
14 0-P LADY HIGH SHERIFF (59) T Forster 6 11 0 ....A Thornton
15 SONG EXPRESS J Bosley 6 11 0 ....M Bosley
16 00PP THE COVENTRY FLYER (86) N Smith 7 11 0 ....Mr M Rodda
17 240 GOLDWYN (35) Bob Jones 4 10 7 ....C Llewellyn
- 17 declared -

BETTING: 9-2 Gracefield, 6-1 Music Master, Fred Jeffrey, 7-1 Wren Warbler, 8-1 General Jackie, 16-1 Goldwyn, 20-1 others

1.50 CLAUDE BANKS 70TH BIRTHDAY NOVICE CHASE (CLASS E) £4,500 added 2m 110yds

1 0-64313 FIERCE (13) (D) J Jenkins 8 11 11 ....J Osborne
2 43454-U ANOTHER VENTURE (41) F Murphy 6 11 4 ....P Carberry
3 410-3FP BARTON SANTA (19) S Brookshaw 7 11 4 ....J Railton
4 0/1P2-55 CHIAPPUCCI (16) Mrs E Heath 6 11 4 ....R Supple
5 0/4/PP COPPER CABLE (16) C Smith 9 11 4 ....M Ranger
6 2-D102F HAWAIIAN SAM (22) A Turnell 6 11 4 ....L Harvey
7 6/5F45-P NIGHT FANCY (56) Mrs A Woodrow 8 11 4 ....J A McCarthy
8 45323/2 SUPER COIN (13) R Lee 8 11 4 ....P McLoughlin
- 8 declared -

BETTING: 6-4 Super Coin, 9-4 Hawaiian Sam, 7-1 Fierce, 8-1 Barton Santa, 10-1 Another Venture, 14-1 Chiappucci, 20-1 others

2.20 YELLING NOVICE HANDICAP HURDLE (CLASS E) £3,200 added 2m 110yds

1 4P4-40 LORD WELLINGTON (6) J Jenkins 5 11 10 ....S Fox (5)
2 0P0-623 KING'S GOLD (22) Mrs L Richards 6 11 8 ....M Richards
3 663/0-33 DOMINOS RING (9) O Brennan 7 11 8 ....M Brennan
4 26-P4P4 BIETSCHHORN BARD (7) D Gandolfo 6 11 4 ....M Dwyer
5 F05 BOLD AMUSEMENT (13) W Cunningham 6 11 3 ....N Smith
6 00-4F2 BASSENHALLY (12) Mrs P Sly 6 11 3 ....R Marley
7 5P515-1 MILL O'THE RAGS (77) (D) Mrs D Haine 7 11 0 ....G Hogan (3)
8 06-5 JACK LEADER (61) Mrs J Cecil 5 10 13 ....T Kent
9 40-60 WHISPERING COURT (22) A Turnell 6 10 13 ....G Crone (7)

2.50 BET WITH THE TOTE NOVICE CHASE (QUALIFIER) (CLASS E) £5,000 added 3m

1 U012-31 ACT THE WAG (82) (D) A Turnell 7 11 3 ....P Carberry
2 2204-1F DO RIGHTLY (82) M Bradstock 7 11 3 ....P Holley
3 4P-01FF HEBRIDEAN (24) D Nicholson 9 11 3 ....R Johnson (3)
4 1P-45U QUITE A MAN (8) W Jenks 8 11 0 ....T Jenks
5 P/12P0-6 DO BE HAVE (12) Mrs J Pitman 8 10 10 ....W Marston
6 P-P FLOTATION (16) John Berry 9 10 10 ....J Lawrence
7 124F42 GO BALLISTIC (12) J O'Shea 7 10 10 ....A Dobbin
8 OF MAJORS LEGACY (8) T Forster 7 10 10 ....A Thornton
9 0-510F NUPDOWN BOY (22) N Chance 7 10 10 ....D Gallagher
10 0/4 PALM COURT (21) Mrs L Williamson 8 10 10 ....S McNeill
11 FP542-U PRIORY PIPER (7) J Pickering 7 10 10 ....W Worthington
12 05/5031- SIVLA BAY (236) O Brennan 8 10 10 ....M Brennan
13 /P3P-24 SEDGE WARBLER (20) Mrs P Robeson 9 10 5 ....M Richards
- 13 declared -

BETTING: 2-1 Go Ballistic, 11-4 Act The Wag, 3-1 Hebridean, 7-1 Do Rightly, 20-1 Do Be Have, Sedge Warbler, 25-1 others

3.20 SAPLEY CONDITIONALS HANDICAP HURDLE (CLASS F) £2,850 2m 5f 110yds

1 P-51114 CAN CAN CHARLIE (49) (BF) J Pearce 6 12 0 ....L Aspell
2 234005/ ERZADJAN (675) Mrs M Reveley 6 11 9 ....G Lee (3)
3 P301-15 JOHNS THE BOY (75) N Mason 10 11 8 ....S Haworth (7)
4 00/-6050 FLY BY NORTH (19) D Nicholson 8 11 6 ....X Aizpuru (10)
5 2F0P-6P NORTHERN SQUIRE (20) J Jefferson 8 11 5 ....M Newton (7)
6 05/520/ INNOCENT PRINCESS (645) (D) A James 9 11 0 ....G Tormey
7 00-4505 PLATO'S REPUBLIC (47) (C) J Jenkins 5 10 13 ....S Fox (3)
8 P-31544 PETTAUGH (10) G Hubbard 5 10 12 ....K Gaule (3)
9 100F0-4 DERRING BRIDGE (14) (D) Mrs S Johnson 6 10 12 ....R Johnson
10 6600-61 CAMBO (8) (D) M Banks 10 10 12 (6ex) ....L Aspell
11 4P0P4/0 MORE OF IT (10) M Roberts 11 10 10 ....G Hogan
12 P00-430 ALASKAN HEIR (14) A Streeter 5 10 9 ....A Larnach
13 562/P-00 RING CORBITTS (10) M Roberts 8 10 3 ....D Finnegan (4)
14 40/0046 LEESWOOD (8) R Lee 8 10 0 ....P McLoughlin
15 PP30-35 CAPTAIN COE (14) R Curtis 6 10 0 ....G Crone (4)
16 1P05-09 LOFTY DEED (20) W Musson 6 10 0 ....E Husband
- 16 declared -

Minimum weight: 10st. True handicap weight: Captain Coe 9st 12lb, Lofty Deed 9st 9lb.
BETTING: 9-2 Fly By North, 5-1 Cambo, 6-1 Johns The Boy, 7-1 Can Can Charlie, 8-1 Pettaugh, 10-1 Derring Bridge, Leeswood, 12-1 others

3.50 MARCH HANDICAP CHASE (CLASS D) £5,500 added 2m 110yds

1 1225/4- SURE METAL (449) (D) D McCain 13 12 0 ....D McCain
2 45103-4 REJOINUS (63) (D) J Quinn 11 11 8 ....M Dwyer
3 0-111P6 EEZ-AWAY (36) (D) T Forster 7 11 3 ....J R Kavanagh
4 6/43UF1- MIAMI SPLASH (313) (D) S Earle 9 11 1 ....C Maude
5 43/1/FU WYLAM (6) J Gifford 9 10 1 ....P Hide
6 5F4P-20 PEGMARINE (42) (D) Mrs A Woodrow 13 10 0 ....J A McCarthy
7 4/P/PP4 VODKA FIZZ (44) R Rowe 11 10 0 ....D O'Sullivan
- 7 declared -

Minimum weight: 10st. True handicap weight: Pegmarine 9st 8lb, Vodka Fizz 9st 7lb.
BETTING: 6-4 Rejoinus, 7-2 Miami Splash, 9-2 Eez-Away, 7-1 Wylam, 12-1 Sure Metal, Pegmarine, 16-1 Vodka Fizz

4.20 HUNTINGDON MAIDEN OPEN NH FLAT RACE (CLASS H) £2,000 2m 110yds

1 0- BOXGROVE MAN (320) J Old 6 11 5 ....J Osborne
2 32 BRAMLEY MAY (20) R Williams 6 11 5 ....S Keightley
3 4 FERRERS (35) Mrs P Sly 5 11 5 ....R Marley
4 FIRST INSTANCE D Grissell 6 11 5 ....J Railton
5 5 FLYING FIDDLER (35) M Roberts 5 11 5 ....G Hogan (3)
6 2- GOVERNOR DANIEL (304) J O'Shea 5 11 5 ....S Quilty (7)
7 MILLERSFORD N Gaselee 5 11 5 ....F Cooper (7)
8 RATHKEAL M Heaton-Ellis 5 11 5 ....D Gallagher
9 ROYAL RAVEN J Gifford 5 11 5 ....P Hide
10 6 SIR DANTE (44) R Rowe 5 11 5 ....D O'Sullivan
11 50 SMART LORD (54) J Bosley 5 11 5 ....M Bosley
12 0 THE TOISEACH (47) (BF) J Fanshawe 5 11 5 ....W Marston
13 5 COMPUTERAID LADY (48) R Curtis 6 11 0 ....D Morris
14 0 GOOD GOING GAME (21) W Jenks 5 11 0 ....T Jenks
15 0 MESP (40) J O'Shea 5 11 0 ....A Dobbin
16 0 AYDISUN (21) G Bravery 4 10 7 ....K Gaule (3)
17 FERN GROVE C Wildman 4 10 7 ....A Thornton
18 REPEAT OFFER P Cundell 4 10 7 ....C Llewellyn
19 STARCHY'S QUEST T Jones 4 10 7 ....J R Kavanagh
20 SWYNFORD PRIDE J Bottomley 4 10 7 ....D Byrne
21 TANGO MAN R Price 4 10 7 ....P Carberry
22 SHADY EMMA F Jordan 4 10 2 ....J Lodder
- 22 declared -

BETTING: 3-1 Bramley May, 5-1 Governor Daniel, 11-2 The Toiseach, 6-1 Royal Raven, 8-1 Boxgrove Man, 10-1 Computeraid Lady, 12-1 others

LINGFIELD

HYPERION
1.40 Royal Print 2.10 Mr Nevermind 2.40 Last But Not Least 3.10 Double-O-Seven 3.40 Rakis 4.10 Total Rach

GOING: Standard. **STALLS:** 5f & 1m outside, remainder inside.
DRAW ADVANTAGE: Low for 5f.
■ Left-hand, sharp course (Equitrack surface).
■ Course is south east of town on B2028. Lingfield station (served by London Victoria) adjoins course. **ADMISSION:** All enclosures £9. **CAR PARK:** Club £3; remainder free.

SIS

BLINKERED FIRST TIME: Donia (1.40), **Good So Fa** (1.40).
WINNERS IN THE LAST SEVEN DAYS: Carrolls Marc (1.40) won here on Thursday; **Rakis** (3.40) & **Royal Circus** (1.40) both won here on Saturday.
LONG-DISTANCE RUNNERS: Second Colours (2.10) has been sent 280 miles by Mrs M Reveley from Lingdale, Cleveland; **Double-O-Seven** (3.10) sent 270 miles by M Johnston from Middleham, North Yorkshire.

1.40 THATCHER LIMITED STAKES (CLASS F) £3,700 added 1m 4f

1 0/3450-1 CARROLLS MARC (7) (CD) C Murray 8 9 4 ....J Weaver 6
2 050-441 ROYAL CIRCUS (5) (CD) P Webber 7 9 4 ....F Lynch (7) 3
3 0/00000- KENTAVRUS WAY (72) (C) A Moore 5 9 2 ....Candy Morris 13
4 0/000-00 MEDIA MESSENGER (13) N Littmoden 7 9 2 J Bramhill (7) 14
5 2405/0-6 ROYAL PRINT (12) W Muir 7 9 2 ....Jean-Pierre Lopez 10
6 30400-6 SASSIVER (7) P Kelleway 6 9 2 ....A Clark 9
7 000/0-65 THUNDEROUS (7) J Bridger 5 9 2 ....J Quinn 1
8 000/005- FAIR ATTRACTION (193) J Toller 4 8 12 ....M Rimmer 4
9 60004-0 GOOD SO FA (12) (C) C Allen 4 8 12 ....N Adams 7
10 652000- SEE YOU AGAIN (73) M Bosman 4 8 12 ....R Cochrane 8
11 00/410-0 DONIA (17) (D) J L Harris 7 8 11 ....J F Egan 2
12 406334- HILL FARM DANCER (44) (D) W Musson 5 8 11 ....D Griffiths (5) 5
13 /00000/- JADY'S DREAM (457) B Paling 5 8 11 ....S D Williams 12
14 552630- ENDLESS FANTASY (43) C Cyzer 4 8 7 ....J Stack (3) 11
- 14 declared -

BETTING: 4-1 Royal Circus, 9-2 Hill Farm Dancer, 5-1 Carrolls Marc, 7-1 Endless Fantasy, 8-1 See You Again, Sassiver, 9-1 Donia, 12-1 others

2.10 GLADSTONE CLAIMING STAKES (CLASS E) £4,500 added 1m

1 00211-2 MR NEVERMIND (7) (CD) G L Moore 6 9 5 ..A Lakeman (7) 6
2 11632-0 SECOND COLOURS (15) (C) (D) Mrs M Reveley 6 9 3 ....J Fortune 8
3 1121-13 SPENCER'S REVENGE (10) (CD) (BF) M Ryan 7 8 13 ....G Bardwell 6
4 22402-3 FRESH FRUIT DAILY (21) P Kelleway 4 8 12 ....R Cochrane 1
5 4/50000- WHITE HEAT (106) W Turner 4 8 4 ....C Adamson (5) 3
6 00/655-0 THORNY BISHOP (14) (C) J Bridger 5 8 3 ....J Quinn 4
7 61336-0 BURNT SIENNA (16) (D) J Moore 4 8 0 ....M Baird (5) 7
8 0000-56 OFF THE AIR (8) (D) B Llewellyn 5 8 0 ....N Carlisle 2
- 8 declared -

BETTING: 2-1 Spencer's Revenge, 9-4 Mr Nevermind, 4-1 Fresh Fruit Daily, 9-2 Second Colours, 12-1 Off The Air, 20-1 Burnt Sienna, 25 others

2.40 MACMILLAN HANDICAP (CLASS E) £4,650 added 3YO 5f

1 10620-0 GAGAJULU (15) (D) (BF) P Evans 9 7 ....J Fortune 5
2 034-1 LAST BUT NOT LEAST (12) (CD) R Johnson Houghton 9 1 ....J Weaver 6
3 25451-3 GI LA HIGH (23) (CD) J Berry 9 0 ....A McGlone 3
4 55430-2 SUNSET HARBOUR (2) D Wilson 8 11 ....R Cochrane 2
5 10600-0 CHEMCAST (20) (D) D Nicholls 8 10 ....Alex Greaves 1
6 0133-24 DANCING JACK (12) (CD) J Bridger 8 10 ....J Quinn 4
7 5606- DOUBLE OR BUST (38) A Newcombe 8 1 ....P Fessey (5) 7
- 7 declared -

BETTING: 9-4 Last But Not Least, 11-4 Gi La High, 7-2 Sunset Harbour, 8-1 Double Or Bust, 13-2 Dancing Jack, 10-1 Gagajulu, 14-1 Chemcast

3.10 DISRAELI MAIDEN STAKES (CLASS D) £5,450 added 3YO 7f

1 DOUBLE-O-SEVEN M Johnston 9 0 ....J Weaver 5
2 4000-22 BAWI (12) W Muir 9 0 ....Jean-Pierre Lopez 4
3 00- ALLSTARS DANCER (38) T J Naughton 8 9 ....T Ashley (7) 1
4 2-4 CREEKING (14) Sir Mark Prescott 8 9 ....C Nutter 2
5 0- NORTHERN MIRACLE (83) C Wall 8 9 ....W Lord 3
- 5 declared -

BETTING: 8-4 Bawi, 7-4 Double-O-Seven, 7-2 Creeking, 10-1 Allstars Dancer, 20-1 Northern Miracle

3.40 LLOYD GEORGE HANDICAP (CLASS D) £5,450 added 7f

1 0/400/ ABTAAL (280) (D) R Hodges 6 10 0 ....S Drowne (3) 1
2 501-111 RAKIS (5) (CD) M Bosman 6 10 0 (6ex) ....R Cochrane 3
3 004401- PRIMA SILK (62) (D) M Ryan 5 9 10 ....T Ives 5
4 2654-24 PERILOUS PLIGHT (7) (CD) (BF) W Muir 5 9 9 ....J Weaver 6
5 231-040 FOUR OF SPADES (5) (CD) P Evans 5 9 7 ....J Fortune 4
6 04021-3 ROBO MAGIC (16) (C) (BF) L Montague Hall 4 9 7 ....J F Egan 2
- 6 declared -

BETTING: 7-4 Rakis, 3-1 Prima Silk, 9-2 Perilous Plight, 13-2 Abtaal, 7-1 Robo Magic, 8-1 Four Of Spades

4.10 WILSON HANDICAP (CLASS F) £3,900 added 1m 2f

1 04020-0 CANARY FALCON (10) John Berry 5 10 0 ....V Smith 4
2 60012-6 AWESOME POWER (21) (CD) J Hills 10 9 11 ....A Clark 9
3 103350- ULTIMATE WARRIOR (131) (C) C Cyzer 6 9 10 ....J Weaver 6
4 0320-00 ILANDRA (14) S Dow 4 9 8 ....R Cochrane 8
5 10301-3 TOTAL RACH (21) (CD) R Ingram 4 9 7 ....T Ashley (7) 12
6 5/6000-0 CLAQUE (20) D Chapman 4 9 4 ....A Culhane 7
7 005/ PRINCESS PARROT (573) Lord Huntingdon 5 8 13 ....Aimee Cook (7) 1
8 04640-3 LUCKY TUCKY (17) J Jenkins 5 8 13 ....J Fortune 3
9 4113-20 REAL MADRID (3) G Enright 5 8 8 ....N Adams 10
10 302152- LADY SABINA (117) (D) W Musson 6 8 5 ....P McCabe (3) 5
11 0U10-56 SCENT OF POWER (10) N Babbage 6 8 4 ....F Norton 13
12 00000-0 ZUNO FLYER (7) A Moore 4 8 1 ....M Fenton 2
13 20600-0 HUNZA STORY (18) (D) N Littmoden 4 7 10 ....J Bramhill (7) 11
- 13 declared -

Minimum weight: 7st 10lb. True handicap weight: Hunza Story 7st 8lb.
BETTING: 7-2 Lady Sabina, 9-2 Total Rach, 5-1 Awesome Power, 6-1 Lucky Tucky, 8-1 Real Madrid, 10-1 Zuno Flyer, 12-1 Ilandra, 14-1 others

RACING RESULTS

FOLKESTONE

1.20: 1. MIROSWAKI (S Ryan) 6-4 fav; **2. Mead Court** 33-1; **3. Nahrawali** 50-1. **19 ran.** 20, 2. (R Akehurst). **Tote:** £2.30; £1.10, £17.20, £9.80. Dual Forecast: £69.80. CSF: £55.13. NR: Northern Kingdom.

1.50: 1. UBU VAL (A S Smith) 11-8 fav; **2. Ocean Leader** 7-2; **3. Djonnyo** 33-1. **13 ran.** 15, 11. (W Bethell). **Tote:** £1.90; £1.00, £1.90, £12.90. DF: £6.50. CSF: £6.74. £36.92.

2.20: 1. NORTH BANNISTER (A P McCoy) 8-1; **2. Damcada** 4-1 fav; **3. Its Grand** 5-1; **4. Celtic Lilley** 33-1. **17 ran.** nk, 12. (T McGovern). **Tote:** £13.70; £2.50, £1.70, £1.40, £10.80. DF: £71.70. CSF: £43.50. Tricast: £172.49. Trio: £133.30.

2.50: 1. HAWTHORNE GLEN (B Fenton) 5-1; **2. Arctic Life** 9-2; **3. Fleur de Tal** 15-2. **12 ran.** 4-1 fav Brownside Brig (pulled up). 2, 9. (Mrs M Long). **Tote:** £7.30; £2.60, £3.20, £2.20. DF: £15.60. CSF: £28.55. Tricast: £161.10. Trio: £67.20.

3.20: 1. EARLY DRINKER (J A McCarthy) 6-4 fav; **2. Drumcullen** 14-1; **3. Precious Wonder** 40-1. **16 ran.** 12, 30. (O Sherwood). **Tote:** £2.20; £1.20, £7.40, £19.50. DF: £33.00. CSF: £23.46. Trio: £264.30.

3.50: 1. HARVEST VIEW (G Bradley) 13-2; **2. Indian Summit** 9-2; **3. What's The Joke** 10-1. **11 ran.** 11-4 fav Dark Nightingale (pu). ½, 10. (C Brooks). **Tote:** £10.30; £3.20, £1.10, £2.80. DF: £28.90. CSF: £35.46 Trio: £72.10. Tricast: £271.17. NR: Fly In Amber.

4.20: 1. MAESTRO PAUL (Mr P O'Keeffe) 20-1; **2. Rhoman Fun** 25-1; **3. Opal's Tenspot** 16-1; **4. Cool Character** 12-1. **16 ran.** 4-1 co favs Le Chat Noir, Rocco, Royal Square. nk, 15. (J Gifford). **Tote:** £26.80; £7.10, £3.70, £4.00, £2.90. DF: £169.50. CSF: £410.74. Tricast: £7,181.97. NR: Tricksome.

Jackpot: £67,215.10.
Placepot: £326.20. **Quadpot:** £36.90.
Place 6: £112.26. **Place 5:** £45.67.

SEDGEFIELD

1.10: 1. BALHERNOCH (L Wyer) 2-1; **2. Welsh Mill** 8-11 fav; **3. General Jimbo** 25-1. **13 ran.** nk, 15. (M H Easterby, Malton). **Tote:** £3.50; £1.10, £1.30, £18.70. DF: £1.70. CSF: £4.24. Trio: £18.20. NR: Highland Way.

1.40: 1. ORCHIDARMA (M Dwyer) 9-1; **2. Wild Rose of York** 5-1; **3. Vintage Taittinger** 5-2 fav; **4. Thomas Rand** 7-1 . **17 ran.** 3, 7. (J Quinn, Malton). **Tote:** £15.30; £2.40, £1.80, £1.70, £1.80. DF: £37.40. CSF: £60.44. Tricast: £145.22. Trio: £31.60. NR: Auntie Lorna.

2.10: 1. GENERAL'S ORDERS (W Fry) 7-2; **2. Sunderland Echo** 8-13 fav; **3. Roy Boy** 20-1. **14 ran.** 1½, nk. (J Norton, Barnsley). **Tote:** £6.30; £1.40, £1.10, £4.70. DF: £3.50. CSF: £6.39. Trio: £46.30.

2.40: 1. CALL THE SHOTS (K Jones) 15-8 fav; **2. Go Silly** 7-2; **3. Finch's Gem** 3-1. **13 ran.** 2, 30. (J Wade, Ferryhill). **Tote:** £2.80; £1.40, £1.20, £1.30. DF: £4.70. CSF: £10.06. Trio: £2.70.

3.10: 1. TRESIDDER (R Garritty) 7-1; **2. Daxford Hut** 6-1; **3. Kaandabil** 12-1. **12 ran.** 4-1 jt favs Briar's Delight & Flash of Realm (5th). 6, 4. (M W Easterby, Sheriff Hutton). **Tote:** £8.00; £3.00, £2.20, £2.90. DF: £41.20. CSF: £63.01. Tricast: £625.49. Trio: £146.10.

3.40: 1. NEW CHARGES (B Grattan) 6-1; **2. Golden Nugget** 4-1 jt fav; **3. High Penhowe** 4-1 jt fav. **10 ran.** 13, 6. (P Beaumont, Brandsby). **Tote:** £7.60; £2.70, £2.40, £1.60. DF: £16.10. CSF: £30.59. Trio: £12.20. Tricast: £101.75.

4.10: 1. MEADOWBURN (T Reed) 5-1; **2. Derry's Delight** 12-1; **3. Miss Lamplight** 10-1. **17 ran.** evens fav Gallants Delight (5th). 3½, 1¾. (W Reed, Hexham). **Tote:** £3.80; £1.40, £2.30, £4.30. DF: £9.90. CSF: £69.99. NR: Decent Penny.

Placepot: £25.10. **Quadpot:** £19.60.
Place 6: £21.68. **Place 5:** £17.66.

WOLVERHAMPTON

2.00: 1. FARMOST (C Nutter) 4-7 fav; **2. Dummer Golf Time** 3-1; **3. Coastguards Hero** 50-1. **13 ran.** ½, 6. (Sir Mark Prescott). **Tote:** £1.80; £1.10, £1.30, £63.20. DF: £3.40. CSF: £3.37. Trio: £103.30.

2.30: 1. RAMBO WALTZER (Alex Greaves) 5-1; **2. Berge** 5-4 fav; **3. Everset** 3-1. **11 ran.** nk, 1½. (D Nicholls). **Tote:** £10.50; £4.10, £1.10, £1.90. DF: £8.30. CSF: £13.55. Trio: £8.80.

3.00: 1. FIELD OF VISION (J Weaver) 8-1; **2. Maple Bay** 5-2 fav; **3. Kintwyn** 9-2. **12 ran.** hd, 2½. (M Johnston). **Tote:** £10.70; £3.20, £1.90, £3.30. DF: £38.90. CSF: £31.50. Tricast: £102.94. Trio: £31.30. NR: Desert Power.

3.30: 1. CHINA CASTLE (J Fortune) 9-4; **2. Theatre Magic** 7-1; **3. Lady Dignity** 10-1. **9 ran.** 7-4 fav Domoor. 1¼, 1¾. (P Haslam). **Tote:** £3.80; £1.40, £3.20, £3.50. DF: £16.00. CSF: £20.03. Tricast: £133.07. Trio: £24.60.

4.00: 1. STEVIE'S WONDER (G Bardwell) evens fav; **2. Fraise du Roi** 8-1; **3. El Nido** 7-2. **11 ran.** hd, 20. (M Ryan). **Tote:** £2.10; £1.20, £2.20, £1.90. DF: £12.70. CSF: £11.78. Trio: £4.80. NR: Castle Secret.

4.30: 1. CHADWELL HALL (C Teague) 5-1; **2. King Rambo** 10-1; **3. Featherstone Lane** 8-1. **11 ran.** 7-2 fav Southern Dominion (4th). 2, 1¼. (S Bowring). **Tote:** £8.40; £2.10, £6.40, £2.30. DF: £54.40. CSF: £58.06. Tricast: £384.36. Trio: £73.00.

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Britain survive Spanish onslaught

Hockey

BILL COLWILL
reports from Barcelona

Great Britain	2
Spain	2

Great Britain remain on course for a place in the Atlanta Olympics following their draw with Spain in Barcelona yesterday in the fifth day of the qualifying tournament.

After twice taking the lead, they allowed Spain back into the game and then had to endure a very tense last 25 seconds as Spain took their only penalty corner of the game. Fortunately Nick Thompson was quickly off the line to charge down Joaquin Malgosa's shot.

It was Malgosa, with a block on Rob Thompson in the 17th minute, who provided Britain with their only penalty corner of the game. On ran specialist Calum Giles and with what appeared nonchalant ease placed the ball into the back of the net.

Eight minutes into the second half Jaime Amat drifted around the back of the British defence to equalise from a narrow angle. Within two minutes Britain were back in the lead, Rob Thompson finding himself unmarked at the top of the circle and lashing home Nick Thompson's free hit.

Juan Garcia-Maurino scored Spain's second to maintain their unbeaten record in the tournament. Britain play the Netherlands today in their fifth game.

GREAT BRITAIN: S Mason (Reading); J Wyatt (Reading), Soma Singh (Southgate), G Fordham (Hounslow), Kalbir Takher (Cannock), S Hazlitt (Hounslow), C Meyer (Cannock), J Shaw (Southgate), R Thompson (Hounslow), J Laslett (Teddington, capt), N Thompson (Old Loughtonians). Substitutes used: C Giles (Havant), H Hoskin (Reading), D Hall (Guildford).
SPAIN: R Jufresa; J Malgosa (capt), J Amat, R Sala, J Amau, V Pujol, J Garcia-Maurino, P Usoz, A Iglesias, J Escarre, X Amau. Substitutes used: X Escude, J Dinares.
Umpires: P von Reth (Neth), H Ehlers (Den).

Lara recalled for World Cup assignment

Cricket

Brian Lara has been included in West Indies' 14-strong squad for next month's World Cup. The former Warwickshire player was at the centre of controversy following his withdrawal from the World Series in Australia, but he was always a likely choice after he declared his intention to return to international cricket.

The announcement by the West Indies Cricket Board of Control suggested that the matter may not have been cut and dried, however. "Brian Lara was written to by the chairman of the selection committee regarding his involvement in several recent incidents and requesting reassurance of his future commitment to the team, and his loyalty to his fellow players," a statement said.

"The player restated his commitment to West Indies cricket and his respect and admiration of the West Indian community. He added that if selected, he would endeavour to perform to the best of his ability."

The selectors also recalled the middle-order batsman Keith Arthurton.

WEST INDIES WORLD CUP SQUAD: R B Richardson (capt), J C Adams, C E L Ambrose, K L T Arthurton, I R Bishop, C O Browne, S L Campbell, S Chanderpaul, O D Gibson, R A Harper, R I C Holder, C L Hooper, B Lara, C A Walsh.

Boon retires from playing for Australia

David Boon is to retire from international cricket after Australia's third and final Test against Sri Lanka, which began today in Adelaide. The 35-year-old was dropped from Australia's limited-overs team earlier this year and was not named in the squad for the World Cup.

He scored a century in the second Test against the Sri Lankans in Melbourne in December, however, and his 7,344 runs in 106 matches put him second behind Allan Border in Australia's all-time Test run-makers list, while his 21 Test centuries rank him fourth among Australians. His Test average stands at 43.71, and he has averaged a century every 8.95 innings.

Boon said he decided to retire after being dropped from the Australian one-day team before Christmas. "Anyone would be stupid or lying if they said they didn't feel some sort of pressure, but the pressure was coming from within," he said.

"It was a decision I made about six weeks ago after discussing it with my wife and family. I loved every single moment of my Australian career and it will be difficult adjusting to life without international cricket."

Boon said he plans to continue playing at Sheffield Shield level for Tasmania.

sport

Crocks may hand Asian gold to Els

Golf

ANDY FARRELL
reports from Singapore

The start of a new season – everyone fresh, fit and raring to go. Not quite. Greg Norman is in bed with a chest infection. Sam Torrance has a septic toe and Ian Woosnam's back is still playing up. The 1996 European Tour may be set to go farther afield than ever before, but it is an expansion of the physiotherapy trailer that is most needed.

One reason Johnnie Walker has continued its connection with the Asian Classic, which usually attracts the world's best players, after pulling out of the World Championship, which did not, is that for superstar golfers Asia in January is a better proposition than Jamaica just before Christmas.

This year's event in Singapore has not gone quite according to plan. Colin Montgomerie, keen to equal Peter Oosterhuis's record of four successive Order of Merit titles, has stayed at home for the birth of his second daughter, Venetia Grace. Seve Ballesteros is on a five-month sabbatical learning how to relocate a fairway and Jose-Maria Olazabal withdrew because his injured foot means he can still not walk 18 holes.

Playing golf is not the only demand on the top players. There is their second career as course builders. Bernhard Langer broke his journey to open his new design at Lotus Hill in China; Woosnam spent the weekend scouting the land for a project in Bangkok and Norman looked in on his work on the first integrated resort and golf course in India. Near Delhi, it is called Sterling Grand, and usually the question is: How many? This is the man who earned $30m (£20m) from the sale of the equipment company Cobra, in which he bought a $1.9m stake in 1990.

Norman was feeling ill enough to want to skip the 36-hour stopover, but according to his manager, Frank Williams, the owner pleaded with him to go. He was given an injection, but felt worse and his temperature is still in the 100s. "I don't think we have another Phuket," Williams said, referring to when Norman won the same title two years ago after not playing a practice round. "He only has a 10 per cent chance of playing."

Torrance also missed yesterday's pro-am, but the swelling on his poisoned foot has gone down and he expects to play.

Woosnam has been resting his back since November, but three days' practice have seen it stiffen up again. "I've been swinging badly for a couple of years and that might be the problem. When I aim straight it goes crooked and when I aim crooked it goes straight," the Welshman said.

All this is good news for Ernie Els, who is confident after winning last week's South African Open, the defending champion, Fred Couples and even John Daly, who has given up burgers in a search for the form that made him the Open champion, rather than finishing 45 shots behind Couples in Jamaica.

While the American Tour opens with the West Coast swing, the European goes global. First there is this week's Johnnie Walker Classic in Singapore, then it is Down Under for the Heineken Classic in Perth next week, before going to South Africa for a further three tournaments. The advantage is that the Tour can provide events at this time of year on good courses in good conditions. This has been in response to criticism from the membership, who sometimes find it hard to say anything nice about their work place. Not at Tanah Merah, which is next door to Changi – the airport, not Nick Leeson's current abode. "I can't fault it," Woosnam said.

On the minus side, the reduced entry means no spots for the newcomers to the Tour. While most will make their debuts in South Africa, Steve Webster, the winner of the qualifying school has received a sponsor's invitation. He has just signed as a client for the International Management Group, who happen to be promoting the event.

FA CUP COUNTDOWN: Former Northern Ireland stalwart plots Ipswich's downfall. **Phil Shaw** reports

Nicholl waiting for happy hour

Half an hour's satisfaction – that is how Chris Nicholl quantifies the rewards of a week's work as a football manager. Always assuming, of course, that his Walsall team have won.

If that makes Nicholl sound like the dour antithesis of charismatics like Barry Fry and Ron Atkinson, it is misleading. His manner is quiet but warm and his humour self-deprecating, while his love of the game is reflected in the progressive style on which Walsall will stand or fall at Ipswich in the fourth round of the FA Cup on Saturday.

It is just that Nicholl believes running a team to be more stressful than people imagine, and prefers plain speaking to wisecracking as a method of articulating his view. Asked how he filled in the days during the three years between leaving Southampton and resurfacing at Walsall, he replies: "I enjoyed myself."

> 'I think I did a good job at Southampton, and as time goes by I have to say it looks a better job'

Yet all the time he was desperate to jump back in, and he still has ambitions to manage a Premiership club. Why? Again he shrugs and smiles. "Mad."

There must be a method to this madness. Last season, his first at the Bescot Stadium, Nicholl took Walsall up to the Second Division. Although below half-way, they are only three points away from the play-off places and well clear of the bottom-four berth they occupied in late October.

None of which is remarkable until you consider that Walsall had previously won promotion only four times. Or that in 17 months at a club surrounded by the big spenders of Aston Villa, Wolves and Birmingham, Nicholl has yet to pay so much as a pound in transfer fees. He is tickled to learn that even the famous Saddlers' side of 63 years ago, who beat Arsenal in arguably the greatest Cup upset of all, cost £70 to assemble.

Chris Nicholl, whose Walsall side travel to Portman Road in the FA Cup on Saturday — Photograph: Peter Jay

But then Nicholl, a former Villa and Northern Ireland centre-half who will be 50 in October, had already demonstrated at the highest level his ability to survive – and more – on a shoestring. The young talents he blooded at The Dell included Alan Shearer, Matthew Le Tissier, Rod Wallace and Jeff Kenna. Among those he bought, for a total of £1m, were Tim Flowers, Barry Horne and Neil Ruddock.

"I think I did a good job at Southampton," he says, "and as time goes by I have to say it looks a better job. We never finished below 14th, we were a decent team who scored goals, and I left them with some good young players as well as in a healthy state financially."

One assumes he was bitter about the way it ended. "Absolutely not. Bitterness is a wasted emotion that could drive you round the bend. The board at Southampton are excellent. They sacked me and, yes, I hope to prove them wrong, but they put up with me for six years. That was long enough for anybody. They wanted a change and they were right to do it."

Nicholl is clearly not one to indulge in platitudes. He admits, for instance, that although he enjoyed the leisure time, he had begun "to doubt everything, including myself" before he was invited to succeed Kenny Hibbitt at Walsall (where, revealingly, he is the 34th manager in 68 seasons). Nor has his modest success altered his feelings about his profession.

"Managing is a very stressful job. It doesn't matter how many you've won – we've just won four in a row and not conceded a goal – on Saturday evening you get half an hour of satisfaction. Then the physio comes in and says so and so's got a bad knee and you find another player's going to be suspended. It's then that the worries start to build up for the next game.

"What screws you up is that there's no physical outlet for the tension. The players get their high from running around. We get the adrenalin but we lose control the moment they run out of the dressing-room. And if one of your players isn't feeling right or the referee doesn't like you that day, you're in trouble no matter what work you've done in the week."

> 'Managing is a very stressful job. What screws you up is there's no physical outlet for the tension'

The closest he has been to the FA Cup final, the event which hooked him on football, was in 1986 in his first season in charge of Southampton. They took a Double-bound Liverpool to extra time in the semi-final remembered for the horrific broken leg suffered by the Saints' Mark Wright.

This time last year, Walsall led Leeds 1-0 in the third round before conceding an equaliser three minutes from time. They then forced the additional half-hour at Elland Road before, as Nicholl concedes, "we tired and they swamped us".

This season's run includes, bizarrely, an 8-4 win over Torquay on a frost-affected surface, during which Nicholl lost track of the score. Walsall have since tightened up considerably, an improvement to which Derek Mountfield – an FA Cup winner with Everton – has made a major contribution since arriving from Carlisle.

Nicholl had expected to be renewing acquaintance with Shearer *et al* on Saturday (as did Blackburn, the champions having somewhat prematurely sent Walsall their tickets for Ewood Park before losing a home replay to First Division Ipswich). "In theory, it gives us a better chance," he says. "Still a small chance, but a better one than we'd have had at Blackburn."

The Cup is no place for half-measures. If Walsall win this one, expect Nicholl to relent and enjoy a full hour's satisfaction before the pressure starts again.

Questions of Sport

£40,000 to be won

Today we are giving you another sporting chance of an instant win.
In Saturday's paper, there was a Questions Of Sport multi-choice scratch card which, if you answer three sporting questions correctly, gives you the chance of an instant cash prize from £1 to £1,000.
You don't have to be an obsessive fan to play - a good general sporting knowledge should suffice. But remember, you only get one chance to answer each question, so if you are in any doubt, check it out.
The card contains eight games so you can play daily through to Friday 26 January. This Saturday in The Independent we will give you a new Questions of Sport scratch card.
As well as the daily instant cash prizes there is a weekly accumulator prize of £5,000 to be won.

HOW TO PLAY
Today we are playing the section of the card dated Thursday 25 January. Below are three sporting questions, each with three possible answers coded as A, B and C. Scratch off your answer to Question Nineteen either A,B or C in the Q19 column then repeat for Q20 and Q21.

THE QUESTIONS
Q19 In which sport is the America's Cup a major trophy?
A: Baseball
B: Sailing
C: Ice hockey

Q20 What is the distance of the Grand National?
A: Three miles
B: Five miles
C: Four and a half miles

Q21 Which footballer currently playing in the Premiership won three Premiership / First Division winners' medals in succession?
A: Alan Shearer
B: David Batty
C: Eric Cantona

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IF you have revealed three identical cash amounts of £5 or under, DO NOT PHONE. Take the claim coupon OR a piece of plain paper with your name and address on it PLUS the relevant section of the card to one of the newsagents listed below.
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New Questions Of Sport scratch card in Saturday's Independent

THE INDEPENDENT

Smith back on Olympic course

Sailing

STUART ALEXANDER
reports from Miami

Lawrie Smith, Britain's most highly paid and high profile sailor, who already has an Olympic medal, is back on the treadmill here. Today sees the first race in the first of two trial regattas to select Britain's 1996 representatives in the stately Star class of two-man keelboat.

Smith is also planning a summer campaign in two kinds of spectacular boats that are as far removed as possible from the Star – the Ultra 30 and the Australian 18-foot skiff. He is also talking to three possible backers of the 1997-98 Whitbread race attempt: the ambitious Emirate of Dubai; Chris Dickson's sponsors, Tag Heuer; and the managers of the Swedish EF Education syndicate.

And he continues steadfastly to resist the attentions of this September's Grand Mistral round the world race organisers to skipper one of their boats.

So why does he still want to compete in the Olympics? The irresistible drug is the pure test of skill, rather than a budget-based arms race, against the best in the world. Smith spent part of November and December in the cold and miserable Solent assessing with crew Chris Mason and coach Bill Edgerton the merits of various different sails on offer for a campaign being financed, with "just about enough to cover it", by the Rockport boat shoe company.

Even then, he concedes they were not putting in as much time as the Americans, who may be out five days a week. And he knows he can now be in the Australian sunshine not only for some skiff sailing but a likely substantial boost to his bank balance.

Smith is apprehensive, surrounded as he is by Olympic squad members from many of the major European countries and the US at the Coral Reef Yacht Club, one of five which hosts the 10 classes of Olympic yachts all now tuning up in earnest in preparation for Savannah in July.

The remaining two big Olympic testing grounds are at Hyères, France, in April and Medemblik, the Netherlands, in May. But both will be academic for Smith if he does not perform well enough in Miami now, and again at the second regatta in March, to secure the British place.

The uncertainty shows. "Who do you think will win?" he asks anyone who will listen. Up against him are the Barcelona pair, David Howlett and Phil Laurence, Soling contender Glyn Charles with George Skoudos, Stuart Hudson with David Munge, and the Hicks brothers, Michael and David.

Smith should be the favourite. His Barcelona bronze was in the Soling and another in the Star would be reward enough. But he likes an edge, a perceptible advantage, and he has yet to achieve that. Money will not buy it, talent plus a flat-out campaign may see him through. That is, if he can first clear the selection hurdle.

SPORTS LETTERS

Levy on transfers

From Mr M Shackel
Sir: I do not believe for one moment that the majority of rugby clubs wish to turn back the clock and halt the move to professionalism.

Surely the election of Cliff Brittle was a signal that there is more to the world of rugby than the top 11 clubs and the national squad, important though they are to the game, and to the media.

What the middle and lower order clubs (as supposedly represented by Mr Brittle) want to hear is some encouragement from the RFU and perhaps a decent share in the projected bonanza should it ever materialise.

There are various ways in which a desirable fostering of the rank-and-file clubs can be achieved. I would suggest one move. A levy on any professional club signing a player from an amateur club whether that player is to be paid or not. The levy, fixed at say £2,000, to go direct to the "feeder" club.

Yours sincerely,
MIKE SHACKEL
Sanderstead, S Croydon

Letters should be marked "For publication" and should contain daytime and evening phone numbers. They should be sent to Sports Editor, The Independent, 1 Canada Square, London E14 5DL. They may be shortened for reasons of space.

McRae pledges to stiffen the Saints

Rugby League

DAVE HADFIELD

The new coach of St Helens, Shaun McRae, has promised to add defensive steel to the club's traditional flair. McRae, the former assistant coach to Australia and the Canberra Raiders, arrived to take up his post yesterday and said that the talent was already at the club to enable them to match Wigan.

"There is a lot of work to be done," McRae said, "but the potential is there to be consistent – and that is what wins competitions."

McRae has watched tapes of Saints' games, including their recent Regal Trophy final defeat by Wigan. "St Helens were very unlucky, but, at the end of the day, they didn't win. If you can be consistent in your overall performance against Wigan, then you've got a chance," he said. "That is the first thing I'll be looking for."

McRae has left Canberra after six successful years, "because I fancied a change. I had it in my mind that my next move would be as a head coach. The fact that it is at St Helens is tremendous for me.

"The situation is very much like that at Canberra, where we we're scoring a lot of points but having a lot scored against us.

"We did something about the defence without spoiling the attack."

Saints' captain, Bobbie Goulding, publicly critical of the sacking of the club's previous coach, Eric Hughes, made his peace with the new regime at McRae's welcoming press conference.

"We were all shocked by Eric going and no one was more disappointed than me," he said. "But I'm looking forward to working under Shaun. I know it is going to be very hard, but I'm looking forward to every minute of it."

McRae, who was sought by other Australian clubs as well as being hotly tipped as Canberra's next head coach, trained his squad yesterday and takes charge of them in a match for the first time when they meet Castleford in the Challenge Cup on Saturday.

Hughes is one of three coaches heading the field for the position at London Broncos that fell vacant when Gary Grienke was dismissed on Tuesday. Brian Johnson, who resigned at Warrington earlier this month, and Clive Griffiths, who was overlooked as his successor, are also on a short-list of contenders.

"I would be foolish not to find out whether coaches of this calibre were interested in joining us," said the club's chairman, Barry Maranta.

Lewis' bout with Bowe is called off

Boxing

Britain's former World Boxing Council heavyweight champion Lennox Lewis has abandoned hopes of fighting Riddick Bowe on 20 April as Bowe and his manager, Rock Newman, are in dispute with the American cable network, Home Box Office.

Panos Eliades, Lewis's backer, said: "HBO and Newman have not managed to settle their differences. It must go to court and Lewis will not fight Bowe next," Eliades said. "We are looking at all other top opponents, but it looks like Michael Moorer and Axel Schulz are not available, while Evander Holyfield is not ready."

TODAY'S NUMBER

6

The years that the 28-year-old wing defence Fiona Murtagh was vice-captain of the England netball team before taking over from Kendra Slawinski, who has retired after winning a record 128 caps. Murtagh's first game as captain will be against Northern Ireland on 24 February.

In his great days, the late Jock Stein preached that it was pointless getting upset over decisions. It was excellent advice

Anyone like me who has been following football longer than it is comfortable to remember must wonder how some of the most evil players imaginable would have made out today under the intense scrutiny of television.

Two who spring immediately to mind, both internationals who performed beguilingly in the role of what was known as a scheming inside-forward, concealed their spite with such cunning that it often went undetected by referees and never caught the public's attention. Opponents approached them with the utmost caution but they never figured on bar room lists of the nastiest footballers.

By now you have probably guessed I am coming to the controversy surrounding televised proof that Julian Dicks of West Ham got away with a dreadful foul on Andy Cole of Manchester United at Upton Park on Monday seconds before Nicky Butt was sent off.

The outcome is that Dicks claims he is being victimised by the Sky presenter, Andy Gray, who highlighted another incident involving him earlier this season, entering the renewed debate over the difficulties imposed on referees by television replays.

Some sympathy is held out personally for Stephen Lodge, the match referee, who has more or less made it clear that his eyes are where you expect to find them, not positioned in his backside. "With the number of cameras Sky have at their live games these days I could referee from the stand using all their angles and technology," he said. "They see everything. Referees have to make split-second judgements with only two angles, theirs and that of the adjacent linesman. We have to live with television but it is making the job a nightmare."

Times have changed, maybe for the worse, maybe for the better, but it is not all that many years ago since the old Football League, through its splenetic secretary, the late Alan Hardaker, demanded absolute discretion when first allowing the BBC to show televised highlights of Saturday matches. Even to criticise referees in studio reports was to invite the wrath of

KEN JONES

Hardaker – who said, incidentally, that the game would be shown live over his dead body.

It is anybody's guess how Hardaker would have reacted to today's state of affairs, but mine is that he would have turned purple with rage. As for calling referees to account on the basis of television replays, forget it.

Doubtless on account of the trouble that seems to follow his club around and perhaps suspecting a vendetta, the Wimbledon manager, Joe Kinnear has advanced what you may think to be the quite ludicrous idea of having a referee in the stands to settle controversial incidents.

To my mind, when you start talking technology in sport you start talking trouble. Where will it end? How long would it have taken at the Parc des Princes in Paris last week to establish from a television replay that Tony Underwood did not correctly ground the ball when claiming a try against France?

Twice in two weeks recently, the Pittsburgh Steelers moved towards the Super Bowl against Dallas Cowboys on Sunday with the help of illegal touchdowns. Because there is no time in the play-offs for bad calls to balance themselves out it was felt generally that the National Football League's decision to dispense with instant replays was a blunder they will live to regret. As Dave Anderson of the *New York Times* put it, "It's inevitable that sooner or later Commissioner Paul Tagliabue will be presenting the Lombardi Trophy to an undeserved team."

The incident that sparked this off came in the American Conference championship game between the Steelers and the Indianapolis Colts. None of the officials noticed that Kordell Stewart had stepped out of bounds behind the end zone before catching a pass. Thus the Colts were exceedingly put out by a 20-16 loss. Different games for different tastes, but similar problems.

In his great days as manager of Celtic, the late Jock Stein preached that it was pointless getting upset over decisions because it interfered with concentration, and usually they evened themselves out. It was excellent advice.

Much the same can be said about decisions in cricket other than run-outs. In any case, what would the heroes do without something to moan about?

Klinsmann faces knee operation

Football

Jürgen Klinsmann is facing a knee operation after injuring himself during a friendly for his club, Bayern Munich, against Cagliari in Italy on Tuesday.

Klinsmann hurt his knee when he fell awkwardly after going up for a header. The German champions are training in Sardinia during the *Bundesliga*'s winter break, and the injury has hit Klinsmann at a time when he has been enjoying some of the best form of his life following last season's successful year with Tottenham.

Klinsmann, who has scored some crucial goals this season in the national team's European Championship qualifying campaign, may miss next month's restart to the German First Division. If he needs an operation, his hopes of playing against Nottingham Forest in the Uefa Cup quarter-finals at the start of March could be in danger.

On his return to Germany, Klinsmann had an appointment to see the Bayern club doctor, Hans-Wilhelm Mueller-Wohlfahrt, who has a reputation for getting sportsmen back to fitness quickly. His list of patients includes Boris Becker and Linford Christie.

Klinsmann's injury comes as a blow to Bayern, who have been struggling with injuries to leading players in the past year, including French international striker Jean-Pierre Papin and Lothar Matthäus.

Papin has been unable to make an impact in Germany, while Matthäus only recently returned to action following Achilles tendon operations and has lost his place in the German national team. German internationals Thomas Strunz and Christian Ziege have also been struggling to get fit as the Bavarian side prepare for the second half of the season.

Rangers will hold talks over the next few days with the advisers of Brian Laudrup in an effort to secure the services of the Danish international. Laudrup's contract expires in 18 months, but Rangers are making an early move to ensure they keep one of their highest-profile players at Ibrox.

David Murray, the Rangers chairman, said: "When you have a special talent – and Brian Laudrup is a special talent – you do what you can to hold on to it. I want to see Brian Laudrup stay at Rangers and I know the Rangers supporters do as well."

Laudrup was linked with a possible move to Manchester United earlier this season and was quoted as saying he would like to link up with his Danish international team-mate Peter Schmeichel at Old Trafford.

He had a superb debut season last term, helping Rangers to a seventh successive league title and became the Professional Footballers' Association and Football Writers' Association player of the year.

Keegan returns without Asprilla

NICK DUXBURY

Kevin Keegan returned to Tyneside from Rome yesterday without a piece of paper bearing Faustino Asprilla's signature, but the Newcastle manager still expects to complete the £6.7m signing of the striker by next week.

Keegan left behind his vice-chairman, Freddie Shepherd, and fellow director Douglas Hall to hold further discussions with Parma over the 26-year-old Colombian, who has agreed a four-year contract. The only sticking point appears to be exactly how Newcastle will pay the club record fee.

The Liverpool striker Stan Collymore has failed in his appeal to overturn a Premier League ruling that he was not entitled to a £425,000 pay-off from his former club Nottingham Forest. The 25-year-old believed he should have got a five per cent share of the record £8.5m transfer fee Liverpool club paid Forest last summer.

Mark Hughes will start a five-match ban on Monday after referee Robbie Hart refused to back down over his sending-off of the Wales striker against Everton 10 days ago.

Lee Chapman, the veteran striker on secondment at Leeds, has also lost his appeal against a sending-off and will begin a three-match ban on Saturday which covers the rest of his loan spell from Ipswich.

Vinnie Jones has agreed personal terms with Birmingham City, who are now waiting for Wimbledon to accept an offer of £300,000, plus £100,000 should they win promotion to the Premiership.

Sheffield United have offered Stoke £300,000 for the defender Lee Sandford. Ronnie Ekelund, the Danish international midfielder, has joined Coventry on loan from Barcelona with a view to a £500,000 transfer.

Ipswich's leading scorer, Alex Mathie, will miss Saturday's FA Cup fourth round home tie against Walsall after suffering a shoulder injury.

Video appeal for Butt

Manchester United will use video evidence in a bid to clear their young midfielder Nicky Butt, following his sending-off against West Ham at Upton Park on Monday.

Alex Ferguson, the United manager, is to give the Football Association a tape of the incident which led to Butt's second booking of the game.

He is to ask the FA to judge whether the referee Stephen Lodge made a mistake – the first time United have taken that step since the appeal system was changed on the introduction of automatic suspensions.

Butt faces a one-match ban on 5 February after his dismissal, but Ferguson is convinced that his player was harshly punished when he was shown a second yellow card for a 75th-minute challenge on Julian Dicks.

"I thought Nicky was unfortunate to go off because he got the ball OK," Ferguson said. "I think we should send the video to Lancaster Gate in fairness to the lad. If it is a clear sending-off and the player deserved it we would accept it and get on with it, but I think Nicky was very unlucky."

The incident which led to Butt's dismissal was sparked by a two-footed challenge by Dicks on the United striker Andy Cole, which was highlighted by Sky Sports who were screening the game live.

The FA said yesterday that they did not plan to take any action over Dicks's lunge, but the player himself was furious over his trial by television. He claimed Sky's pundit, Andy Gray, has a vendetta against him after a row earlier this season when Gray accused him of stamping on Chelsea's John Spencer.

"Andy Gray is making a career out of having a go at me," Dicks said. "The way he keeps going on about me, I'll be on an FA charge again soon. Two-footed tackles can be fair and this one was."

But Gray, who highlighted the incident using video playback, said: "Julian should not blame me. People wanted to know why Cole was acting like a madman and risking getting himself sent off. I had the answer on the video replay. I thought it was a dangerous tackle and I have seen nothing since which will convince me otherwise."

The Barnsley manager, Danny Wilson, is poised to buy St Mirren's Scotland Under-21 striker, Barry Lavety. Wilson watched the powerful target man last night at Hamilton and hopes to secure a deal this week.

Lavety has made a successful return to form this season after a lay-off following a positive drugs test. Barnsley will sell their unsettled striker Andy Payton if they can push through the Lavety signing in the next few days.

Having a ball: the Royal Air Force paid a flying visit to Iffley Road yesterday, their scrum-half preparing to take possession as his side shaded a tight encounter, beating Oxford University 23-22 Photograph: Peter Jay

Gunnell targets date for comeback race

Athletics

Sally Gunnell is lined up to race in Britain for the first time for nearly 18 months at the AAA Indoor Championships in Birmingham on 3 to 4 February.

It would be a 400 metres to test her fitness and competitiveness before the Olympic season, in which she defends the 400m hurdles title in Atlanta. A race in Stuttgart on 4 February has also been pencilled in.

Jonathan Marks, a spokesman for Gunnell, who is training in South Africa, said: "The likelihood is that it will be Birmingham, but a final decision has not yet been made."

Her last domestic appearance was in the World Cup at Crystal Palace in September 1994. She had to write off last year – and her defence of the world title in Gothenburg – because of a heel injury which later needed surgery. All that the British women's team captain managed was two low-key 400m races in Germany.

Gunnell, who will be 30 on the day of the hurdles semi-finals in Atlanta, was on crutches for a month before starting the long haul back to regaining fitness. "It's been a very frustrating time, but there was never a moment when I thought of giving up," she said. "I feel recharged and maybe, in one way, the injury was not such a bad thing."

Kenya's Peter Rono has revived his Olympic dreams eight years after winning the 1500m gold medal in Seoul and will return to competition next month.

Rono, who had virtually disappeared from the sport in recent years, will take part as a guest in a race at the Belgian national championships on 4 February before running the 1500m at an international meeting in Ghent on 7 February, according to the Ghent organiser, Wilfried Meert.

Meert said Rono, who will turn 29 five days before the Atlanta Games, had been working hard in recent months to prepare for his return. To qualify for Atlanta, Rono must first survive the testing pre-Olympic trials in Kenya which, Meert said, were likely to take place in late June.

■ The Hungarian middle-distance runner Sandor Iharos, who set 11 world records, died yesterday of heart failure in Budapest at 65. From May 1955 to July 1956, Iharos set records at 3,000m (7min 55.6sec), two miles (8:33.4), 1500m (3:40.8), 5,000m (13:40.6), three miles (13:14.2), six miles (27:43.8) and 10,000m (28:42.8). Iharos never won an Olympic medal and missed the 1956 Olympics in Melbourne because of the Soviet Union's invasion of Hungary.

SPORTING DIGEST

All square for New Zealand

Cricket

Set 367 to win, Zimbabwe's batsmen failed to mount a serious challenge as the second Test against New Zealand in Auckland tailed off into a draw yesterday. Despite an opening stand of 120 from Grant Flower and Stuart Carlisle, the tourists batted out the final day at their leisure to finish at 246 for 4.

(Final day: New Zealand won toss)
New Zealand – First Innings 251 (Fleming 84, Cairns 57).
Zimbabwe – First Innings 326 (Houghton 104).
New Zealand – Second Innings 441-5 dec (Spearman 112, Twose 94, Cairns 120).

ZIMBABWE – Second Innings
(Overnight 39-0)

G W Flower c Kennedy b Patel	71
S V Carlisle c Fleming b Kennedy	58
G J Whittall c Germon b Patel	10
*†A Flower not out	45
A D R Campbell c Germon b Twose	34
C Wishart not out	12
Extras (lb6 nb8 w2)	16
Total (for 4, 100 overs)	**246**

Fall: 1-120 2-144 3-145 4-225.
Did not bat: D L Houghton, P A Strang, H H Streak, E A Brandes, B Strang.
Bowling: Allott 19-3-53-0; Cairns 23-6-49-0; Kennedy 22-3-61-1; Patel 27-6-80-2; Larsen 5-3-8-0; Twose 3-1-5-1; Astle 1-0-4-0.
Match drawn. Series drawn 0-0.

NEW ZEALAND WORLD CUP SQUAD: L K Germon (capt), N J Astle, C L Cairns, S P Fleming, C Z Harris, R A Kennedy, G R Larsen, D Morrison, D J Nash, D N Patel, A C Parore, S A Thomson, R G Twose, C J Spearman.

Ruckwood breaks own record

Swimming

Adam Ruckwood rounded off the Sheffield World Cup meet with a flourish last night by breaking his British 200 metres backstroke record and giving his Olympic preparations a surprise boost.

The Commonwealth champion won the final in 1min 56.00sec, cutting 0.41sec off the British record he set in the same pool a year ago.

He will be able to draw great encouragement from having set the third-fastest time in the world in the winter short-course season. The victory also lifted him into joint second place in the World Cup overall backstroke rankings.

Cousins finds his best form

Ice skating

Steven Cousins is lying third after the men's short programme at the European Figure Skating Championships in Sofia behind Ukraine's Viacheslav Zagorodniuk and the defending champion, Ilya Kulik of Russia.

Cousins' routine to the tune "Cherry Pink and Apple Blossom White" was full of slinky moves to the slow sections of the music. His triple axel-triple toe loop combination was slightly flawed on the second landing but not enough to cost him dear.

Cousins, British champion for the past seven seasons, has been rising slowly but steadily up the ranks and yesterday's performance was one of his finest.

American football

Bill Walsh, who guided the San Francisco 49ers to three Super Bowl titles, is rejoining the team as an assistant head coach to work on 49ers' offense. Marc Trestman remains offensive co-ordinator under head coach, George Seifert.

Athletics

Daniela Bartova, of the Czech Republic, broke the women's world indoor pole vault record when clearing 4.20 metres at a meeting in Prague yesterday. She beat the mark set last February by Sun Caiyun, of China, by five centimetres.

Badminton

Britain's Joanne Wright and Julie Bradbury, seeded fourth in the women's doubles at the South Korean Open in Seoul, yesterday went through to the semi-finals by beating Marina Yakushewa and Elena Rybkina, of Russia, 15-3, 3-15, 14-4. In the men's singles Britain's Darren Hall was beaten 18-14, 15-6 by Kim Hak-kyun, of South Korea.

Basketball

NBA: Toronto 86 New Jersey 79; Atlanta 84 Cleveland 72; Indiana 117 Phoenix 102; Orlando 105 Philadelphia 90; Chicago 99 New York 79; Utah 98 Portland 72; Dallas 111 Sacramento 109.

Bowls

WELSH NATIONAL SINGLES CHAMPIONSHIP (Llanelli) Semi-finals: C Lewis (Merthyr) bt M Morgan (Llanelli) 7-1 7-6; J Price (Swansea) bt B Powell (Port Talbot) 7-4 7-5.

Cricket

SECOND UNDER-19 TEST (Harare) Second day of four: Zimbabwe 47 (P Hutchison 5-11) and 13 for 2; England 344 for 7 dec (D Nash 65no, D Sales 50).

TODAY'S FIXTURES

Football

LEAGUE OF WALES: Llanelli v Afan Lido (7.30).
PONTINS LEAGUE First Division: Liverpool v Sheffield Utd (7.0); *(at Southport)*. **Second Division:** Grimsby v Bradford (7.0); Aston Villa v Sunderland (7.0).
UNIJET SUSSEX COUNTY LEAGUE First Division: Peacehaven & Telscombe v Crowborough Athletic (7.30).

Rugby Union

CLUB MATCH: Askeans v Brunel Univ (7.30).

Other sports

BOWLS: CIS Welsh Masters (Llanelli).

Football

AFRICAN NATIONS' CUP (South Africa) Group A (Johannesburg): South Africa 0 Egypt 1 (El Kasa). **(Durban):** Angola 3 (Omam-Biyik 25, Mouyeme 82, Vicente 0g90) Cameroon 3 (Tony pen 38, Pauleta 57, Quinzinho 80). **Final Group A standings:** South Africa, Egypt 6pts; Cameroon 4; Angola 1. *South Africa and Egypt qualify for quarter-finals.*

PREMIER AND FIRST DIVISION SUSPENSIONS: Seedings Off: T Roberts (QPR) 1 match from 31 Jan; *D Peacock (Newcastle) 1 match from 31 Jan;* L Chapman (Leeds Utd) 3 matches from 27 Jan; R Earle (Wimbledon) 2 matches from 27 Jan; A Moore (Middlesbrough) 3 matches from 27 Jan; *M Hughes (Chelsea) 3 matches to follow 2 matches;* S Stewart (Sheff Wed) 3 matches from 24 Jan; D Ginola (Newcastle) 3 matches from 24 Jan; C Fleming (Oldham) 4 matches from 31 Jan; G Jones (Tranmere) 1 match from 31 Jan; B Law (Wolverhampton) 1 match from 31 Jan; M Venik (Sheff Utd) 1 match from 27 Jan. **21 Penalty Points:** D Wallace (Leeds Utd) 2 matches from 30 Jan; J Ebbrell (Everton) 2 matches from 31 Jan; K Rowland (West Ham) 2 matches from 27 Jan; D Wise (Chelsea) 2 matches from 27 Jan; P Beesley (Leeds Utd) 2 matches from 25 Jan; M Doyle (Millwall) 2 matches from 31 Jan; M Whitlow (Leicester) 2 matches from 31 Jan; A Rogers (Tranmere) 2 matches from 27 Jan; A Melville (Sunderland) 2 matches from 28; Jas M Bodley (Southend) 2 matches from 27; Jan K O'Neill (Norwich) 2 matches from 28; Jas A Rae (Millwall) 2 matches from 27 Jan; J James (Luton) 2 matches from 27 Jan; A Edwards (Birmingham) 2 matches from 28 Jan; G Strodder (Notts County) 2 matches from 23 Jan. **33 Penalty Points:** *M Hughes (Chelsea) 2 matches from 27 Jan.*

TUESDAY'S LATE RESULTS: FA Cup third-round replay: Oldham 2 Barnsley 1 *(Oldham away to Swindon Town). Anglo-Italian Cup semi-final:* Ipswich 2 Port Vale 4. **Endsleigh Insurance League Second Division:** Blackpool 1 Wycombe 1; Hull City 0 Brighton 0; Rotherham 2 Bradford City 0; Wrexham 0 Bristol City 0. **Third Division:** Mansfield 2 Cambridge Utd 1; Plymouth 1 Scunthorpe 3; Scarborough 1 Rochdale 1. **Bell's Scottish League Premier Division:** Falkirk 0 Motherwell 1; Kilmarnock 1 Aberdeen 1; Raith 0 Partick 2. **Division:** Airdrie 0 Morton 2; Dumbarton 1 Dundee 2; St Johnstone 3 Clydebank 1. **Second Division:** Forfar 2 Montrose 1; Queen of Sth 3 Berwick 0; Stenhsmuir 2 East Fife 2. **Third Division:** Brechin 3 Alloa 0; Cal Thistle 1 Ross County 1. **FA Umbro Trophy First-round replays:** Emley 3 Morecambe 1 *(Emley at home to Kidderminster or Gateshead);* Nantwich 2 Hednesford 0 *(Nantwich away to Wembley);* Chorley 2 Boston Utd 1 *(Chorley at home to Gainsborough);* Cheltenham 1 Dover 1 *(after extra time);* Sudbury Town 1 Trowbridge 1 *(after extra time);* Slough 4 Farnborough 3; St Albans 2 Kettering 3 *(after extra time; Kettering away to Slough);* Enfield 2 Hayes 2 *(after extra time); Abingdon 2 Colwyn Bay 0 (Abingdon away to Guiseley);* Yeovil Town 2 Bath City 3 *(after extra time; Bath at home to Enfield or Hayes);* Gresley Rovers 1 Stalybridge 0 *(Gresley away to Blyth Spartans).* **Isis League Premier Division:** Worthing 0 Kingstonian 5. **First Division:** Barton Rovers 1 Ruislip Manor 0; Thame 2 Barking 1; Uxbridge 0 Bognor Regis 0. **Second Division:** Canvey Island 4 Ware 1; Chalfont St Peter 2 Leatherhead 2; Saffron Walden 2 Metropolitan Police 1. **Third Division:** Kingstonian 3 Horsham 3; Southall 1 Wingate & Finchley 2; Windsor & Eton 7 Flackwell Heath 0. **Guardian Insurance Cup fourth round:** Wokingham 2 Hitchin 3. **Carlton Cup third round:** Heybridge Swifts 0 Boreham Wood 2; Leyton Pennant 5 Purfleet 1. **Carlton Trophy third round:** Bracknell 2 Lewes 0; East Thurrock 2 Tilbury 2 *(abandoned 90min).* **Vauxhall League Premier Division:** Knowsley 4 Winsford 1. **Bazaar Homes League Premier Division:** Crawley 3 Cambridge City 3. **Midland Division:** Bedworth 3 Bridgnorth 0. **Great Mills League Premier Division:** Elmore 1 Tiverton Town 4. **Interlink Express Midland Alliance:** Hinckley Athletic 1 Bilston 4. **Jewson Eastern League Premier Division:** Diss Town 4 Sudbury Town 3; Halesgh 0 Woodbridge 5; Harwich & Parkeston 2 Lowestoft 1. **North West Counties League First Division:** Blackpool Rovers 1 Rossendale 1; Flixton 4 Penrith 0; Marine Road 1 Ridgeway 1; Salford 1 Newcastle Town 0. **Challenge Cup third-round replay:** Atherton Collieries 3 Nelson 2. **Northern Counties East League President's Cup fourth round:** Goole Town 0 Belper Town 3. **Unijet Sussex County League First Division:** Three Bridges 2 Oakwood 0. **Wilmslow Knot League First Division:** Faversham 2 Folkestone Invicta 7. **Irish League Coca-Cola Floodlit Cup first round first leg:** Ballymena 0 Crusaders 2. **First round second leg:** Ards 2 Larne 0 *(Aggregate 5-0);* Bangor 2 Coleraine 2 *(2-4);* Cliftonville 1 Omagh 1 *(2-1);* Glentoran 2 Newry 0 *(9-2);* Linfield 1 Distillery 0 *(5-0);* Portadown 3 Ballyclare 0 *(4-2).* **Pontins League First Division:** Everton 0 Nottingham Forest 1; Notts County 1 Derby County 1. **Third Division:** Chesterfield 2 Chester City 1. **Avon Insurance Combination First Division:** Portsmouth 1 Southampton 1; Queen's Park Rangers 1 Oxford Utd 0; Watford 0 Norwich 1.

Golf

Basil Steer, formerly a selector for both England and the Britain and Ireland Walker Cup side, has been appointed president of the English Golf Union.

The Jersey Open is being transferred to the European Seniors Tour this season. Another European Tour schedule change is that the British Masters at Collingtree Park in Northampton will now be the first qualifying tournament for next year's Ryder Cup.

Hockey

OLYMPIC QUALIFYING TOURNAMENT (Barcelona) Fifth day: Canada 1 Malaysia 2; India 2 Belarus 0; Spain 2 Great Britain 2; Belgium 4 Netherlands 9. **Standings** *(after 4 games):* 1 Netherlands 6pts; 2 Spain 6; 3 India 6; 4 Malaysia 6; 5 Great Britain 5; 6 Canada 3; 7 Belarus 0; 8 Belgium 0.

Ice hockey

NHL: New Jersey 3 Los Angeles 1; Florida 5 Washington 4.

Ice skating

EUROPEAN CHAMPIONSHIPS (Sofia) Men's short programme: 1 V Zagorodniuk (Ukr) 0.5pts; 2 I Kulik (Rus) 1.0; 3 S Cousins (GB) 1.5; 4 I Pashkevich (Rus) 2.0; 5 A Yagudin (Rus) 2.5; 6 D Dmitrenko (Ukr) 3.0. **Selected:** 17 N Wilson (GB) 8.5.

Pools

LITTLEWOODS: Treble chance: 22pts £728,971.50, 22 £2,264.55, 21 £129.30, 20 £19.80, 19 £4.15. **Four draws:** £32.05. **10 homes:** £17.45. **Five aways:** £123.45.

VERNONS: Treble chance: 22pts £6,728.45. 21 £59.55, 20 £6.55, 19 £1.50. **10 homes:** £20.20. **Five aways:** £14.65.

Swimming

WORLD CUP MEETING (Sheffield, final day) Men's finals: 50m freestyle: 1 M Fostier (Barnet Copthall) 22.13; 2 S Brinn (Jam) 22.74; 3 I Bende (Cz Rep) 22.82. **200m freestyle:** 1 D Loader (NZ) 1min 48.49secs; 2 A Clayton (City of Leeds) 1:47.76; 3 J Salter (City of Birmingham) 1:49.12. **1500m freestyle:** 1 P Palmer (City of Lincoln) 14:59.98; 2 S Cameron (NZ) 15:18.91; 3 S Pampana (It) 15:26.58. **100m breaststroke:** 1 Chuan Ping (China) 1:00.87; 2 D Malek (Cz Rep) 1:01.47; 3 G Schmid (US) 1:01.75. **100m butterfly:** 1 M Milosevic (Cro) 53.62; 2 D Kalchev (Bul) 53.88; 3 T Ruppsin (Ger) 54.03. **50m backstroke:** 1 T Kato (Cro) 25.12; 2 N Willey (Barnet Copthall) 25.22; 3 C Renaud (Can) 25.55. **200m backstroke:** 1 A Rudkwood (City of Birmingham) 1:56.00 (Irish record); 2 C Renaud (Can) 1:57.46; 3 A O'Connor (Rep Irl) 1:59.71 (Irish record). **200m medley:** 1 J Seemen (Fin) 2:01.65; 2 C Myden (Can) 2:02.35; 3 K Cao (Cro) 2:02.96. **Women's finals: 100m freestyle:** 1 S Rolph (City of Newcastle) 55.73; 2 V Johnsen (Norl 56.54; 3 J Amey (Can) 56.90. **400m freestyle:** 1 I Dalby (Nor) 4:11.17; 2 C Borgato (It) 4:13.63; 3 D Kennedy (Can) 4:14.40. **50m breaststroke:** 1 T Miller (Nor) 32.27; 2 S Brownsdon (City of Coventry) 32.35; 3 A Wilson (NZ) 33.07. **200m breaststroke:** 1 M Hardman (City of Birmingham) 2:28.43; 2 T Miller (Nor) 2:31.07; 3 F Baca (It) 2:33.27. **100m backstroke:** 1 S Price (Barnet Copthall) 1:02.97; 2 W Greaves (Loughborough Students) 1:03.88; 3 L Scott (Loughborough Students) 1:04.38. **100m medley:** 1 S Rolph (City of Newcastle) 1:02.57; 2 D Gorszczak (Pol) 1:06.16; 3 A Wilson (NZ) 1:06.82. **400m medley:** 1 A Wilson (NZ) 4:43.93; 2 H Slatter (Warrington Warriors) 4:48.12; 3 V Horner (Derwentside) 4:47.82. **50m butterfly:** 1 Wei Yue Zhong (China) 27.54; 2 J Amey (Can) 28.31; 3 G Ujcic (Cros) 28.35. **200m butterfly:** 1 L Biancani (It) 2:13.41; 2 H Slatter (Warrington Warriors) 2:15.18; 3 A Bennett (Nova Centurion) 2:15.44.

Tennis

Britain's Chris Wilkinson beat the No 3 seed, Frederik Fetterlein, of Denmark, 7-6, 4-6, 6-2 in the second round of the ATP Challenger event in Heilbronn, Germany yesterday. Wilkinson now takes on Poland's Wojtek Kowalski in the quarter-finals.

Britain's Martin Lee and James Trotman moved into the third round of the boys' doubles at the Australian Open in Melbourne yesterday, with a 6-3, 6-0 win over Mark Fitzpatrick of Australia and Germany's Benjamin Osterbrink.

AUSTRALIAN OPEN (Melbourne) Men's singles, quarter-finals: M CHANG (US) bt M Tillstrom (Swe) 6-0 6-2 6-4; A AGASSI (US) bt J COURIER (US) 6-7 2-6 6-3 6-4 6-2; B BECKER (Ger) bt Y KAFELNIKOV (Rus) 6-4 7-6 6-1; M Woodforde (Aus) bt T ENQVIST (Swe) 6-4 6-4. **Doubles quarter-finals:** S Edberg (Swe) and P Korda (Cz Rep) bt R Leach and S Melville (US) 6-4 6-4 7-5; G Forget (Fr) and J Hlasek (Swit) bt M Knowles (Bahamas) and D Nestor (Can) 6-4 1-6 6-3 6-3. **Women's singles, quarter-finals:** M SELES (US) bt I Majoli (Cros) 6-1 6-2; C RUBIN (US) bt A SANCHEZ VICARIO (Sp) 6-4 2-6 16-14; A HUBER (Ger) bt C MARTINEZ (Sp) 4-6 6-2 6-1; A Coetzer (SA) bt M Hingis (Swit) 7-5 4-6 6-1. **Doubles, quarter-finals:** L Davenport and M J Fernandez (US) bt L Raymond (US) and G Sabatini (Arg) 6-3 4-6 6-2; M McGrath (US) and L Neiland (Lat) bt E Makarova (Rus) and E Menckova (Rus) 6-0 3-6 6-3; N Arendt (US) and M Bollegraf (Neth) bt Y Basuki (Indon) and C Vis (Neth) 6-1 2-6 7-5.

Snow reports

Resort	Conditions (Lower)	Conditions (Upper)	Area open	Last snow	Weather Today	Forecast 2-day
AUSTRIA						
Badgastein	fair	packed	95%	8.1	cloudy	snow
Saalbach	icy	hard	90%	8.1	cloudy	snow
Kitzbühel	closed	hard	80%	8.1	cloudy	snow
FRANCE						
Valloire	patchy	powdery	50%	23.1	cloudy	snow
Tignes	packed	powdery	90%	24.1	cloudy	snow
Cauterets	fresh	fresh	90%	23.1	cloudy	snow
ITALY						
Sestriere	good	fresh	95%	24.1	snow	snow
Selva	good	fresh	100%	23.1	cloudy	mixed
Livigno	good	powdery	100%	24.1	snow	mixed
SWITZERLAND						
Davos	hard	powdery	100%	7.1	cloudy	mixed
Verbier	closed	good	75%	24.1	snow	mixed
NORTH AMERICA						
Steamboat	powder	powder	100%	23.1	snow	snow
Whistler	packed	powder	100%	23.1	clear	sunny
ANDORRA						
Soldeu	powdery	powdery	0%	24.1	snow	snow
(Resort still closed by snow and strong winds)						
SCOTLAND						
Cairngorm	dusting	thin	5%	23.1	windy	snow

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THE INDEPENDENT QUESTIONS OF SPORT
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See Page 22

CHRIS NICHOLL
Waiting for happy hour 22

Schoolboy steps on England ladder

Rugby Union

STEVE BALE

It would be too much to imagine England of all rugby nations taking a risk as inordinate as fielding a teenager, but yesterday the selectors did the next best thing when they plucked an 18-year-old Yorkshire schoolboy from the obscurity of the Third Division and inserted him in their squad.

Though Paul Sampson comes highly recommended, the England manager, Jack Rowell, has never actually seen him play. It would, therefore, metaphorically speaking, bring down the temple walls if Sampson were to go from here and win a place in the team to play Wales at Twickenham on Saturday week. For now, a visit to Twickenham on Sunday to train with the 21 who formed the match squad in France plus eight others will do perfectly well, both for the player and his country.

Sampson plays his rugby for Otley, where he is coached by the former England captain, Nigel Melville. He was England Schools' full-back in last season's defeats of Australia and by New Zealand, but was subsequently moved to the wing. It is in the latter position that he is apparently under greater consideration – insofar as he is at all at present – with pressure thought to be mounting on England's most capped player, Rory Underwood, and other contenders such as Tony Underwood, Ian Hunter and James Naylor all injured.

Rowell has incessantly complained this season that, among other things, the developmental aspects of England rugby has been so neglected that he has no chance of a seamless transition from the old era of Andrew, Moore, etc to the new. In this context, Sampson's elevation now is intended to make his future progression, if he proves so worthy, as painless as possible. "There is an excitement in reaching so far down the supply chain," Rowell said. "The hope is that when he develops later on and returns to the international squad he will not be overawed."

Having lost in France, England have a number of issues to address; hence, in particular, the inclusion of three back row men – Rodber, Diprose and Robinson – as the only additions to the forwards. Adedayo Adebayo is another extra wing and Damian Hopley has played there twice for England this season. Alex King and Will Greenwood, like Sampson, are there for the experience.

Nothing radical should be expected when the team is finalised, at the weekend. France, by contrast, will have to make at least one change. Yesterday the French federation brought the Richard Dourthe affair to its logical conclusion by suspending the 21-year-old centre for 30 days, taking in the Five Nations matches in Scotland on Saturday week and against Ireland in Paris a fortnight later.

After issuing an anguished *mea culpa* on Tuesday for the rush of adrenalin which he says caused him to stamp on Ben Clarke's exposed head, Dourthe expected nothing less. He told the federation he would accept whatever punishment it saw fit. The Scotland selectors, meanwhile, yesterday left their team unchanged from that which unexpectedly won in Dublin.

The smooth progression into the full England side that Rowell desires is strangely served by the half-dozen changes in the A team to play New South Wales in Leicester on Wednesday. England A, remember, won in France before the seniors lost.

On the other hand, the selection does have the advantage of allowing the selectors to view a wider range of would-be internationalists, the most significant introduction being Austin Healey's at scrum-half. As the Orrell player has the speed of the wing he used to be as well as burgeoning scrum-half skills, he could be challenging Matthew Dawson and Kyran Bracken, before long.

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INTERNATIONAL SQUADS

ENGLAND TRAINING SQUAD (Five Nations' Championship v Wales, Saturday 3 February): Backs: M Catt (Bath), P Sampson (Otley), J Sleightholme (Bath), W Carling (Harlequins), J Guscott (Bath), R Underwood (Leicester), P Grayson (Northampton), M Dawson (Northampton), J Callard (Bath), P De Glanville (Bath), K Bracken (Bristol), D Hopley (Wasps), W Greenwood (Harlequins), A Adebayo (Bath), A King (Bristol University), A Gomarsall (Wasps). Forwards: G Rowntree (Leicester), M Regan (Bristol), J Leonard (Harlequins), M Johnson (Leicester), M Bayfield (Northampton), S Ojomoh (Bath), B Clarke (Bath), L Dallaglio (Wasps), V Ubogu (Bath), G Dawe (Bath), D Richards (Leicester), T Rodber (Northampton), A Robinson (Bath), A Diprose (Saracens).

ENGLAND A (v New South Wales, Leicester, Wednesday 31 January): T Stimpson (West Hartlepool); P Hull (Bristol), A Blyth (West Hartlepool), W Greenwood (Harlequins), A Adebayo (Bath); A King (Bristol University), A Healey (Orrell); R Hardwick (Coventry), R Cockerill (Leicester), D Garforth (Leicester), G Archer (Bristol), J Fowler (Sale), M Corry (Bristol), A Diprose (Saracens, capt), R Hill (Saracens). Replacements: P Monsah (Harlequins), R Lilley (Sale), A Gomarsall (Wasps), K Yates (Bath), P Greening (Gloucester), C Sheasby (Harlequins).

SCOTLAND (v France, Murrayfield, Saturday 3 February): R Shepherd (Melrose); C Joyner (Melrose), S Hastings (Watsonians), I Jardine (Stirling Co), M Dods (Northampton); G Townsend (Northampton), B Redpath (Melrose); D Hilton (Bath), K McKenzie (Stirling Co), P Wright (Boroughmuir), S Campbell (Dundee High School FP), J Weir (Melrose), R Wainwright (West Hartlepool captain), E Peters (Bath), I Smith (Gloucester). Replacements: K Logan (Stirling Co), C Chalmers (Melrose), G Armstrong (Newcastle), S Murray (Edinburgh Academicals), F Burnell (London Scottish), J Hay (Hawick).

Sampson on fast track to senior selection

DAVID LLEWELLYN

Yesterday morning a business studies and English A level student at Woodhouse Grove School, near Bradford, was summoned in trepidation to the study of his headmaster, David Welsh. Paul Sampson left it a member of the England rugby union squad.

"I wasn't really sure what to expect when I went in there," Paul Sampson said, "but as soon as I saw him smiling I relaxed. When he told me the news I just felt disbelief. It's been an absolutely crazy day."

For all the apparent bewilderment, though, there is a cool side to the new boy in England's ranks. In one breath he says: "It will be a dream come true to sit alongside the likes of Jerry Guscott, Will Carling and Rory Underwood. I didn't expect in the slightest that I would get the opportunity at this stage in my career."

In the next, however, he talks calmly of the possibility of replacing Underwood – England's record try-scorer and most-capped player. "It's a nice thought, but I am not thinking along those lines for the moment. It's just the practical thing of being with them and absorbing some of the atmosphere, rather than being thrown in at the deep end."

Advanced level: Paul Sampson (centre) celebrates his call-up to the England rugby union squad with schoolfriends yesterday

Photograph: Victoria Matthers

Sampson is a born sportsman. His father, Brian, and his uncles all played professional rugby league for Wakefield; cousin Dean, a Castleford prop, was in the England rugby league World Cup squad last year; another cousin, Denise Ramsden, was a member of the Great Britain 4x100m relay team at the Montreal Olympics and his mother, Christine, is a former England Schools high jump champion.

Sampson and Joe Ewens, the Colston's Collegiate School centre are two of the hottest schoolboy prospects around. Sampson himself is a serious sprinter – Yorkshire Under-20 champion at 60m, 100m and 200m. "Rugby and athletics complement each other," he said. "Rugby gives me strength and stamina; athletics gives me the speed."

His school coach, Roger Howard, said: "I have never seen anything as fast on a rugby field." His headmaster said: "He is solid, but not a giant in any way. He is a tremendous athlete, is very fast and has a lot of rugby skills to ally to that. He is a lively, ebullient young man. There's always a sparkle and a lot of humour about him."

John Elliott, the Rugby Football Union's National Player Development Officer and more importantly an England selector, watched the 18-year-old, in the England Colts trial and, while insisting that a sense of proportion had to be maintained over Sampson's elevation, said last night: "He is very quick and he has a lot of skills. He is stocky, well-built and from what I have seen of him I am immensely impressed."

His speed is undeniably his greatest asset. He has a personal best of 10.7sec for the 100m. Last Sunday, as the England Colts training weekend down at Castlecroft near Wolverhampton came to an end, Sampson's parents picked him and whisked back up to Sheffield where he lifted the 60m title with a run of 6.94 – an Under-20 championship record. Yet this time last week Sampson's ambition was simply to make it into the England Colts team for their match later this season against Italy.

Sampson, who has scored six tries – including a hat-trick – since making his first XV debut for Third Division Otley earlier this season, cites Nigel Melville, the former England scrum-half, as a major influence on his rugby career. "He has helped me a tremendous amount, introducing me gradually to senior rugby and in particular to playing on the wing." And the player Sampson holds in greatest esteem is Paul Hull.

Full-back is his favoured position, although this season he has also turned out at stand-off for his school. "I like Paul Hull's style of play," says Sampson. "He is a runner and I like to think of myself as a running full-back."

Whether England regard him as a running full-back or a full-blown wing is anyone's guess, but they will not stand in the way of his development. Elliott said: "If he shows promise then we wouldn't hold a guy back. We look for fast tracking." They will not find a fast tracker much quicker than Paul Sampson.

Agassi makes a miracle recovery

Tennis

Andre Agassi won a dramatic five-set quarter-final against Jim Courier in the Australian Open yesterday to regain the world No 1 ranking from Pete Sampras.

For the first time in a major tournament, Agassi clawed his way back from two sets down. He said: "In men's tennis, when you're two sets and a break down, it's time for a miracle."

The miracle he needed came with the immediate break of his old rival's serve after Courier had broken in the first game of the third set. Agassi, who at his best can demoralise any opponent with his returns of serve, suddenly raised his game and never looked in serious jeopardy for the remainder of the match.

He broke Courier a further four times to win 6-7, 2-6, 6-3, 6-4, 6-2 in three hours 18 minutes of ferocious tennis and set up a semi-final against Michael Chang. Courier had won their six previous meetings and Agassi said: "It was nice to get over that hurdle."

Agassi was joined in the last four by the unseeded Australian Mark Woodforde – a surprise winner over the seventh seed Thomas Enqvist – and Boris Becker, who thrashed Yevgeny Kafelnikov.

Woodforde's 6-4, 6-4, 6-4 win over Enqvist was built around his near-flawless serving and play at the net, forcing his more powerful opponent on to the back foot. Woodforde is the first Australian to play in a semi-final at Flinders Park since Pat Cash in 1988, and he was cheered to victory by a fiercely partisan crowd.

Woodforde, ranked 67 in the world, collapsed on his back in disbelief as he reached a Grand Slam semi-final for the first time at the 38th attempt. "It is quite incredible – I don't have enough words in my vocabulary to describe how I feel about it," he said. "It's such a sweet feeling."

Kafelnikov's prediction that he could win his first Grand Slam title was made to look rather foolish by Becker, who was in irresistible form during his 6-4, 7-6, 6-1 victory.

Becker overwhelmed Kafelnikov with booming serves and a barrage of sharp volleys. Kafelnikov could only watch in awe and he conceded: "That's what makes the difference between a great player and a good player. There is no question Boris is a great player."

Results, Sporting Digest, page 23

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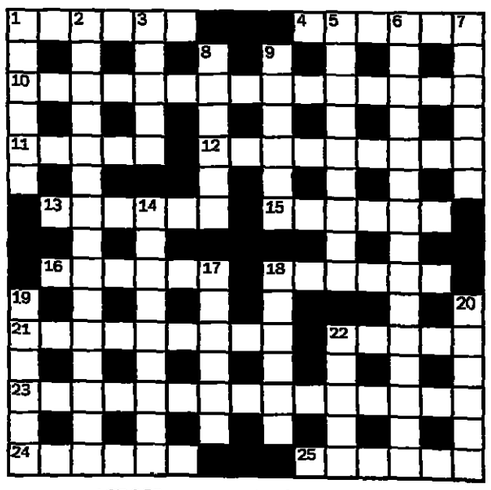
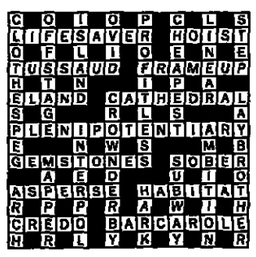
No. 2892. Thursday 25 January — By Bellebore — Wednesday's Solution





ACROSS
1 Colour that's popular at detective inspector's function (6)
4 Study of light measures? (6)
10 A band at Stonehenge? (9,6)
11 Stop bad lady swallowing ecstasy (5)
12 Procrastinating one: ruler in action! (9)
13 Assist Welsh in career (6)
15 Lay out money for former husband to write to daughter (6)
16 Lewis, perhaps, embracing Irish copper in city square? (6)
18 I'm in charge of consultancy (6)
21 A gathering place where gullible people go bust? (9)
22 Doctor embracing bird causes dissent (5)
23 They're taught at Borstal (8,7)
24 Football team's legs? (6)
25 Like soup that's beefy? (6)

DOWN
1 Salt that is capturing Dido's fancy (6)
2 Deceitful untruth about the North: "you can't cross this border by car! (6,5,4)
3 Like Pluto, wholly? That sounds right (5)
5 Ballet dancer's main assets (9)
6 Perhaps Jolson's songs supporting a scene (10,5)
7 Firm that comes just before "Go"? (6)
8 Charge account for service (6)
9 Promise marriage, perhaps, or leave quietly on the shelf (6)
14 Able to take on church and gymnastics? I have (9)
17 Part of an ad which could make you start to sing along (6)
18 Corrupt home counties dictator (6)
19 Conservative hype's breaking the spirit (6)
20 Towards the end of the week, TV company is fond of sport (6)
22 Rough wind's heard (5)

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Venables attempts to forge Dutch masters

Football

CLIVE WHITE

Terry Venables will wear his heart on his sleeve when England host this summer's European Championship finals, but his head will rule in all things emotional. It is the lesson he learned from his bitter experience at Tottenham and the reason why he will not change his mind about resigning as coach, whatever the outcome in June.

Emotional pressure from Tottenham fans had tempted him into the ill-fated partnership with Alan Sugar and he would not make the same mistake again. "At Tottenham I made a heart decision not a head decision and I got overstretched trying to repair my own damage," he said. "I vowed then that I would always make decisions in future with my head. Once is a mistake, twice is foolish."

Even being back among his players this week at England's training camp at Bisham Abbey has failed to prompt a U-turn. But when it comes to football tactics Venables has never been averse to a change in direction, which is what he intends to make in the case of *Euro 96*.

If you can't beat them, join them, seems to be his attitude. Consequently the three-day get-together with his players down by the Thames this week was not so much about all things English as all things Dutch.

In all probability the Netherlands, their group opponents, stand between England and the latter stages of the finals, if not ultimate victory itself, and Venables believes in order to remove that obstacle the hosts will not only have to beat them but beat them at their own game.

Hence the decision to base much of this week's practice and theory on how to counter the Dutch threat and, at the same time, give the opposition a taste of their own medicine. Like the Dutch, Venables has been concentrating on playing with just three flexible defenders as opposed to the popular English ploy of three centre-backs. He is also contemplating imposing his own tactics on the Dutch when they meet, by deploying a central attacker with two wide players to stretch the Dutch trio.

It all sounds uncannily like the old "WM" formation, but we are reliably informed that it is revolutionary. Of course, its going to take more than Tony Adams in dreadlocks to play like the Dutch and Venables emphasised the need for English players to prove they can be adaptable. "I always believe every time you go up a notch, you've got to achieve more things," he said. "If you're going to play against world-class players and world-class thinkers you've got to open those minds up."

He was impressed by how well the players did take on board the new ideas. To a certain extent, some players, such as Aston Villa's Gareth Southgate and Ugo Ehiogu, are already familiar with such tactics, while Sol Campbell and Gary Neville have proved their versatility at Tottenham and Manchester United respectively. "I got a very good feedback," Venables said.

Copying Dutch masters, whether it be Van Gogh or Van Basten, is, of course, easier said than done, as Venables would be the first to admit. "Apart from Barcelona under Cruyff, I don't think anyone in the world can play the way they play. There must be a reason for that because people like to copy success. I think in certain areas you could actually improve on it but you've got to have receptive and strong minds."

Ken Jones, page 23

Sedykh offered Olympic incentive

Athletics

Yuri Sedykh, the double Olympic hammer champion, is being offered substantial cash incentives by the Russian authorities to tempt him into competing at the Olympic Games.

The former world 100 metres hurdles champion Lyudmila Enquist, née Narozhilenko, is also among the athletes offered £34,000 per gold medal, plus £34,000 to the winning coach, while the regional government of St Petersburg will chip in another £68,000. The Russian track federation and its sponsor, Reebok, could bring the total jackpot for a gold medal to £170,000.

"Our facilities are still not good and the standard of living leaves a lot to be desired," Valentin Balakhnichev, president of the Russian athletics federation, said. "But we can offer great wealth to anyone who wins gold for Russia in Atlanta."

Twenty years after winning gold in Montreal, Sedykh, now 40 and living in Paris, might be returning for his fourth Games. He also won gold in Moscow in 1980 and silver in 1988.

Enquist, 31, was reinstated last month by the International Amateur Athletic Federation when a four-year drug ban, imposed in 1993, was quashed by Russian courts. She is now living in Sweden.

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